

**TIGER STANDISH
COMES BACK**

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The
SYDNEY HORLER NOVELS

THE FORMULA
HARLEQUIN OF DEATH
TIGER STANDISH
THE MAN WHO SHOOK THE EARTH
HIGH STAKES
MY LADY DANGEROUS
GENTLEMAN IN WAITING
ADVENTURE CALLING
PRINCE OF PLUNDER
PRINCESS AFTER DARK
THE SPY
CAVALIER OF CHANCE
CHECKMATE
DANGER'S BRIGHT EYES
HORROR'S HEAD
VIVANTI
THE EVIL CHATEAU
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THE SECRET SERVICE MAN
THE MYSTERY OF NUMBER ONE
FALSE FACE
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THE BLACK HEART
IN THE DARK
MISS MYSTERY
THE CURSE OF DOONE
CHIPSTEAD OF THE LONE HAND
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THE WORST MAN IN THE WORLD
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LONDON'S UNDERWORLD

TIGER STANDISH COMES BACK

by

SYDNEY HORLER

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GREAT BRITAIN,
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:
ESSEX

To my friend
R. G. ("Bob") CURTIS
who ought to know a good
story when he types one.

*The first adventure of Tiger Standish appeared
in my novel of the same name.—S. H.*

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TIGER STANDISH COMES BACK

CHAPTER I

THE TRUMPET-CALL

AFTER straightening his back, Sir Lessington Cross gave his verdict.

"H'm !" he said.

The patient looked up.

"What does that mean in plain English ?"

"It means, my dear Standish, that football is entirely out of the question for at least three months."

"Don't be silly !"

The famous surgeon, used to suffering patients gladly, walked across his consulting-room and picked up what looked like a couple of black sheets of paper.

"If you take a squint at these X-ray photographs you will understand what I mean," he remarked. "Where you see these spiky bits"—pointing—"there should be smoothness. And you notice that gap ?"—pointing again. "No, my lad," in a tone of finality, "football is simply out of the question—for at least another three months. As a matter of fact, you had better take things quietly altogether so far as that knee is concerned. I should cut out even dancing."

The man who had once been the most famous centre-forward in English football received the news with a grunt.

"You don't mind if I go on living, I suppose ? There's no pain—at least, not much."

"There may not be now—but there certainly would be if you started playing football again. When did this thing happen?"

"Last October."

"You met with an accident playing for the Swifts, I suppose?"

"Yes. A fellow kicked me from behind, and I fell all of a heap. But look here, I thought I was cured."

"Knees are funny things," commented Sir Lessington Cross. "You've got to treat them gently. I am glad old Farquhar sent you along; at least you will know exactly how you stand. Whether you take my advice or no is another matter, of course."

The Wimpole Street surgeon leaned against the mantelpiece and lit a cigarette. He was a striking figure in his professional garb of dark coat and waistcoat and striped trousers. Here was a man whose skill enabled him to disregard public opinion and, more important still, the private feelings of his patients.

"I always tell my patients the truth," he had said once, to a minor member of Royalty.

The Hon. Timothy Overbury Standish, son of Lord Quorn, got off the couch and reached for his trousers. He performed the almost impossible feat of looking dignified in such circumstances.

"Well, Cross, I have to thank you," he said.

"You know damned well you're doing nothing of the sort," was the blunt comment.

Standish grinned like a discomfited schoolboy.

"All right," he said, "have it your own way. But, at least, I know where I am—I agree with you that far, at any rate. And now, as there doesn't seem to be anything more to be said, I'll push off."

"Come and see me again in three months' time."

"Nothing to be done in the meanwhile?"

"Nothing except reasonable rest. You might try a little massage—if you like, I'll send someone along."

"Oh, I've got a man myself."

"All right." The specialist, thinking of his next

case, turned away, and Standish walked into the wide hall and smiled impishly at the smartly attired maid who opened the door for him.

"Your knees all right?" he questioned.

A dimple—no, two dimples showed in the pretty cheeks.

"So far as I know, sir."

"Well, if they're not, show 'em to Cross. He's told me things about one of mine that I wouldn't have believed."

Without waiting for any reply, the speaker walked down the steps leading to the pavement of Wimpole Street and opened the door of the Bentley.

But he was not allowed to slip away like that. A man of middle age, whose bowed legs were conspicuously set off by his chauffeur's uniform, hopped down from his seat at the wheel and asked him an eager question.

"Wot did 'e say, guv'nor?"

Standish looked at the man to whom the news would act almost as a death sentence, and smiled for the third time since he had heard the staggering bulletin.

"You're much too young to know, Benny."

"Oh, come orf it, guv'nor—wot did 'e say?"

"He told me that on no account must I drink more than four quarts of beer in any one day."

"A joke's a joke, guv'nor," came the rebuke; "but this is serious. Did 'e look at the knee?"

"He almost kissed it."

"Oh, guv'nor, you're 'opeless."

"Drive on, Benny, or we shall prevent that eminent specialist, Sir Lessington Cross, from collecting more than a couple of hundred guineas this morning. There's an old gentleman behind, a retired colonel in the Indian Army, I should say, who's on the point of going up in smoke."

Benny Bannister, who knew from experience that it was no use trying to make his employer serious when he was in this mood, got back into his driver's seat, and the car glided smoothly away.

There was no smile on Standish's face during the drive back to Chester Street. He was thinking deeply. The news just given him had been so disappointing that he could have cursed aloud. He had been out of big football now for nearly four months, giving his injured knee every chance, and he had gone along to the foremost authority in London that morning, buoyed up with the hope that Cross would pass him the O.K. to play again for the Swifts, the most popular League club in London, who were looking forward eagerly to his taking up his old place at centre-forward.

How he had looked forward to putting on his footer boots again and hearing the raucous but stimulating welcome of the Swifts' supporters! Some of the happiest hours he had ever known had been spent on the Swifts' ground, wearing the scarlet jersey of the famous club, and leading the forward line, which under his guidance had been voted the most dangerous attack that London football had known for many years. An essentially modest person, Standish yet knew that the Swifts had not been the same team since he had been forced to give up the game through injury. The announcement that he would play again would be greeted with vociferous excitement by the countless legions who followed the Swifts' fortunes every Saturday.

Now all his hopes had been dashed by a few curt words! There would be no more football for him that season. In three months' time the spacious ground of the Swifts would be closed, and people's minds would be absorbed by cricket and tennis.

It was only natural that he should turn his thoughts after this to the day on which he had sustained that mishap to his vitally important left knee. He had to thank Rahusen for it. Rahusen—the Man with the Dead Face! Rahusen—his mortal enemy! Rahusen—who had sworn to kill him at some unspecified future date.

Well, if Fate did decree that the two ever met again he would not forget the disappointment of this morning.

The Bentley took a turning off Grosvenor Place and drew up at a small but smartly painted house on the right-hand side. Gone were the days of the Portland Street flat. Those had belonged to his bachelordom, and now he was a married man. He had the laugh of Rahusen over that; Sonia Devenish had escaped the toils of the Man with the Dead Face through his agency. A month after he had dispersed the gang, Sonia and he were married.

He had given her the whole of the West End in which to choose a home, and she had selected this little house in Chester Street. Some of the rooms were so small that he felt out of place in them, but at the back, overlooking the garden, he had been able to fix up a room which was part library, part gymnasium, and wholly den. No one ever entered that apartment without first pausing on the threshold to drink in its distinctive atmosphere. For this room belonged as much to Tiger Standish as Tiger Standish belonged to it.

The look on Benny's face when he got out of the car was too much for Tiger.

"All right, I'll tell you what he said, Benny—I haven't to play any more football this season."

"Guv'nor!"

"You needn't make it worse."

"But I thought the knee was all right again."

"I thought so too, Benny." He flexed his leg and suppressed the slight groan caused by the stiffness. "But apparently it's very far from being all right, and I've got to give it at least another three months' rest."

Bannister, who had been a famous professional footballer some years before, and who upon leaving the game had taken up a position as personal servant to the son of the Earl of Quorn, shook his head. He was stunned by the news.

After a moment or so, however, he roused himself.

"I dunno wot you'll think of me, guv'nor—I forgot all about this"—digging into his pocket and bringing out an envelope.

"What's this?" enquired his master.

"Looks like a letter to me." He handed it over.

Standish took a cursory glance at the envelope on which his name was typed, and then asked another question.

"How did you get it?"

"While you were in the doctor's—bad luck to him—a man came up and took a look at the car. Presently he spoke. 'Are you Mr. Standish's chauffeur?' he asked, and when I said, 'Yes,' he give me this note."

"What sort of a man was he?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, guv'nor, I don't know that I should reckernize 'im again. He 'ad a bowler 'at on and a dark-grey overcoat——"

"Altogether a showy dresser. You didn't think of asking him who he was, I suppose?"

"No, I didn't, guv'nor, and you may as well know now as later. To tell yer the truth, I was wonderin' wot was goin' on inside that doctor fellow's."

His master dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand.

"Oh, all right, Benny. Take the car round to the garage. You're driving us down to Sunningdale after lunch, aren't you?"

"That was the idea, guv'nor."

"Darling!"

His wife of three months, who, Tiger was ready to swear, was still the loveliest girl in all the world, took his arm and planted him in a chair.

"Now tell me every word he said," she commanded.

He held up a warning finger.

"Promise you won't leap for joy?"

Sonia tried to look serious, but excitement danced in her eyes.

"I promise, old man."

"Well, then, you shall have your reward: I can't play football again this season."

She clapped her hands, before suddenly sobering.

"Is that very selfish of me? Oh, Tiger, darling"—dropping to her knees and placing his left arm round her neck—"I should be a hypocrite if I said I wasn't glad. It's selfish of me, I know—but I do want you all to myself. He doesn't say you can't play golf?" she asked quickly.

"No—Sunningdale this afternoon is still on."

"Are you going to miss it very much, old man?"

He lied like a Trojan.

"I just went along to Cross as a matter of form, because Farquhar wanted me to," he said, "but I feel I'm getting too old for football in any case." He rose, stretching the shoulders which any living pugilist might have been proud to possess, and gathered her in his arms. "What's playing centre-forward for the Swifts compared with going round Sunningdale in thirty-six over bogey?" he enquired.

"It's only because I love you so, Tiger," she replied. Sonia had known her husband sufficiently long to be aware that when he was cracking jokes of the worst description a deep seriousness often underlay his banter.

He kissed her three times—once on each cheek and a bouncer on the lips—and turned in the direction of his own room.

"Lunch in ten minutes, darling," she advised.

"I shall be ready."

But the gong had gone at least a couple of minutes before Tiger showed himself in the dining-room. He had spent the interval pondering over the few words which he had found typewritten on the sheet of paper taken from the envelope handed him by Benny Bannister.

I am coming back.—Rahusen.

CHAPTER II

ROUND TWO

DURING the early part of the meal Tiger was abstracted. Rahusen! It was curious that the challenge—his enemy had promised that Round Two might commence at an early date—should have arrived practically at the same moment that he had been thinking of the man.

"Don't you want to play golf this afternoon?"

He smiled across the table.

"Of course, my dear. Why?"

"You looked just now as though you were millions of miles away. Still thinking of what Sir Lessington Cross told you?"

"That's a thing of the past, Sonia."

Yes, very much a thing of the past. Unless this message were a hoax he would be so busily occupied that he would have no time to think of even First Division soccer. Rahusen, on leaving London, four months before, had sent him a message. He was going away, the master crook had said, but he would be returning—and information on the fact would be forthcoming at the proper time. Well, he had due notice—it was lying in the breast-pocket of his coat at that particular moment.

Golf was the one chink in Tiger's armour; it was the only game he had ever been unable to master. His prowess at this sport, as he was frank enough to say, was not above the "Z" class. But because Sonia loved the game—she played off a nine handicap—he nobly sacrificed himself, thereby giving wild, unrestrained joy to the caddie.

When he connected with the ball he could occasionally hit a drive of over two hundred and fifty yards. When he didn't (which was more frequently) he tore up fairways like a pneumatic drill and peppered the air with oaths of such an ultramarine character that the immediate world stood and wondered.

His game that afternoon was more than usually inefficient. But, because of Sonia, he did not swear.

"You *will* lift that 'ead of yours, sir," stated his caddie.

"Yes—I want to think," was the unexpected reply.

There were literally miles of thought over which his mind wandered. Two salient facts stood out from all the rest: the first, that definite danger had marked him for its own from that moment; but, more important—far more important—he was an entirely different person from the Tiger Standish of Round One.

Sonia! He looked at her as she took the mashie from her caddie's hand before pitching to the green a hundred and thirty yards away. That creature of beauty and grace his wife? It seemed unbelievable!

He dared not tell her about the message. As brave as any girl had any right to be, yet the knowledge that the man who had caused the death of her stepfather had returned to London would cast a gloom over her life—because of him.

Owing to Tiger's many excursions into the rough, the light was fading by the time Sonia got an admirable five at the home hole.

"You weren't thinking of golf," Sonia gently accused, as they walked back to the club-house.

"It's no good, my dear," he parried; "I shall always be a sick headache at this business."

She would not agree.

"It's because you don't concentrate, darling. Do you feel like having a drink, because, if you don't, we'll get straight back. You remember we are dining with your father tonight?"

"Yes, and going on to the Centurions afterwards."

He was glad they had arranged to put in a couple of hours at the dance club in New Bond Street, because it would allow both of them to relax mentally. Sonia was very acute-minded—he often told her jokingly that she would have made a first-class private detective—and no doubt he had been behaving queerly since lunch.

Benny Bannister was already in the driver's seat by the time they reached the Bentley.

"We're going straight back, Benny," stated Sonia.

"Very good, m'lady." Bannister, whose heart had beat only for his master in Tiger's bachelor days, was a staunch worshipper of the girl his master had married. His rugged face was lit up by a smile as he received his instructions.

"Hullo!" suddenly declared Sonia. "What's that?" She pointed to an envelope on the seat of the car.

Tiger felt the blood rushing to his face. Was this another of Rahusen's epistles?

He reached out, picked up the envelope, and was about to put it in his pocket when his wife touched his arm.

"If it's from one of your girl friends, old man, don't mind me, please."

He looked into the brown eyes that had become slightly misty.

"Girl friends aren't in the programme—and you know it," he replied.

"Of course, darling"—patting his hand. "Read your note."

Because it might have seemed as though he had something to hide, he tore open the envelope. But after he had read the few words on the paper inside, he scrunched the vile thing up and placed it in his pocket.

"Anything important?"

"Nothing at all, my dear."

But even as he said the words a line of typewriting blazed a message in his brain:

Your father first—then your wife—then YOU.

During the drive home Sonia found it hard to stick to her code. When she married Tiger they had made a bargain. It ran something like this: We love each other, and because of that we must trust each other.

That meant that no unnecessary questions were ever asked by either side. If they had been, the high wall which hedged their love and kept it secure might have been broken down. A lesser woman, code or no code, would have pledged her promise at the sight of her husband's grim, set face. Instead, Sonia slipped a small hand inside the big one and held tight to it.

It was only when they were dressing that she went back on her resolve—and then but partially.

"Nothing's worth worrying about, old man," she said, feeling, at the same time, as though her heart would break. This was the first time that Tiger had ever kept his thoughts from her. What had happened?

Hargreaves, the old butler at Quorn House, beamed welcome as they arrived at Lowndes Square half an hour later.

"His lordship has been looking forward to seeing you all day," he told Sonia, with the respectful familiarity of a trusted servant.

She ran ahead, eager to meet the welcoming smile on the face of the man, whom, next to her husband, she admired most in all the world.

Lord Quorn viewed her critically.

"Upon my soul, Sonia, you get prettier every day! What's the secret?"

"I'm in love."

"What, still? Aren't you tired of my boy Tim yet?"

"No"—shaking her head; "and never shall be. What about that for constancy?"

"Must be almost a record in these days," dryly commented Quorn. "Hullo, Timothy! Here's this wife of yours singing your praises in a most disgraceful manner."

"I shall have to cut down her dress allowance."

Sonia swung round like a mannequin.

"Talking about dress allowances, what do you think of my new frock?"

Her father-in-law lowered his monocle.

"When I look at you, my girl, it makes me feel thirty years younger. But for these legs of mine"—patting one of the limbs which had been permanently injured in a hunting accident twenty years before, and had kept him a prisoner to an invalid chair ever since—"I . . ." He sighed as though at the hopelessness of his thoughts.

At ten o'clock the Earl waved his cigar in the direction of the hall.

"I'm a selfish old beast," he said, "but I'm not going to keep you here any longer. Weren't you going on to the Centurions?"

"We were," admitted Sonia slowly.

"Take her away, Tim. She's been here too long now for my peace of mind." The speaker chuckled. "Damn' funny thing," he observed, "being jealous of one's own son!"

"You should take less port and read good books. Come along, Sonia."

She stayed in her chair.

"I don't think I want to go now. The golf this afternoon has made me rather tired."

"Rubbish!" declared her husband. "I've known you play three rounds in a day and never turn a hair!"

She rose reluctantly.

"I'd much rather stay with you," she told the Earl, kissing him on the forehead. "I love Tim, of course, but sometimes he's awfully tiresome."

More than that she would not permit herself to say, but, womanlike, she had to give this gentle thrust. All through the evening, in spite of her attempts to rally him, Tiger had seemed wrapped in his own thoughts, and was almost morose. She knew that the Earl had observed this also, although he had made no comment. Never interfere in other people's business, unless you are

asked to do so, and not often then, had been an invariable rule of his life. It had made him many friends and few enemies.

Once in the open air, Tiger appeared to regain something of his usual spirits.

"Sorry I've been such a bear," he observed, as they got into the car. "Probably liver," he added, as though it were an afterthought.

Sonia, who knew that her husband enjoyed the health of a prize ox, pretended to accept the explanation.

"Of course, old boy," she said, slipping her hand into his.

In this way they arrived at the famous dance club in New Bond Street. By the time the Bentley had pulled up at the entrance, Tiger, with a determined effort, had cleansed his mind of all thoughts of Rahusen and his evil works; he was going to enjoy himself. Not that the crowd who usually forgathered at the Centurions were much in his line—bright young things with few morals and less sense might be amusing enough to read about in the pages of a novel, but they were pretty punk to meet in the flesh. However, this was Sonia's night and not his, and he had to pull his weight.

CHAPTER III

YE MERRIE HAMME-BONE

ALTHOUGH his mind would wander elsewhere, it was not too bad a night. Sonia appeared to be enjoying herself—and that was the main thing. Jack Delaney, who enjoyed the dual distinction of playing cricket for England and polo for the British Army, joined their table twenty minutes after they arrived. He and Sonia danced several times together, and Tiger told himself quite dispassionately that they were by far the most striking couple in that crowded room. He himself had two or three whirls with Kitty Carstairs, the musical-comedy actress, who was starring just then in the new musical play *Take a Chance*, and Olive Dainton, who worked hard, and not too successfully, to be the most decorative débutante in Mayfair. Altogether, a tolerable enough show ; yet he was not sorry when at one o'clock Sonia turned to him with an enquiring look and said :

"Had enough, old man ?"

Delaney laughed good-naturedly.

"Time for grandpa's gruel ?" he enquired.

"It's not that," returned Sonia ; "only I think that Tim wants to get away."

He had prevaricated.

"Any old time for me, my dear," he assured her.

"I think we'll go," said Sonia. "Good night, Jack. Thanks for the dances."

"Hear that, Tim ?" asked the polo player. "This child gives me the time of my life and then piles fair words on the top of it."

"Flatterer!"

During her few months of marriage Sonia, a new-comer to the crowd that haunted the Centurions, had made many friends, and their progress through the thickly thronged room was slow. Eventually, however, Tiger found himself in the cloak-room. Tendering his check, he was about to be helped on with his overcoat, when he heard his name mentioned.

"I hear you've been seedy, Standish—sorry."

Even before he looked into the man's face, the voice had sent a thrill through him.

Taking his time, for the shock had been considerable, he now stared into the smiling face of Aubrey Hamme.

The least that could be said was that this was a dramatic encounter. Five short months before, when, through Sonia, he had first run counter with the Rahusen gang, he had made a vow that he would exterminate the most personally obnoxious member of that organization—the man standing before him now. Chance had willed it that the third member of the crowd, an Italian named Carlimero, should be the first to suffer death at his hands; but Aubrey Hamme was marked second on the list.

His first overwhelming impulse was to rush at this Titan (Hamme weighed something like sixteen stone and stood six feet three inches in height) and soil the floor of the cloak-room with his carcass. Apart altogether from his having joined up with Rahusen again—a possibility which he could not ignore—what the fellow was doing at the New Bond Street dance club that night was beyond his conception. The Centurions were rather particular in the people they admitted, and Aubrey Hamme's reputation stank to the heavens.

But there the man was—a solid fact which could not be ignored.

Yet it was certainly very mysterious. Scotland Yard had grabbed Hamme at the dust-up which had marked the conclusion of Round One, and the fellow, he understood, had been "put away" to one of His Majesty's carefully selected health resorts for a number

of years. It was rum—very rum. He would have to make some enquiries.

In the meantime, Ye Hamme-Bone continued to grin provokingly.

Tiger kept his hands in his overcoat pockets to avoid yielding to that first temptation. There was Sonia to be considered; if he indulged in this scrap, the reeking tongue of scandal would be unloosed and she would quickly get to hear of it. No—not now, he told himself.

“Were you speaking to me?” he remarked coolly.

“Bit up-stage, aren’t you, old man?” The grin on Hamme’s face was more pronounced.

Tiger dug his fists still deeper into his overcoat pockets. He was not handling the matter in his customary fashion. At any other time he could have been relied upon, he hoped, to have passed off this unexpected meeting with a combined aplomb and sangfroid which would have left the other speechless. But one thing coming on top of another that day had reduced his usual high spirits to those of a normal being.

But he must not lose caste.

“Oh!” he now said casually. “Didn’t recognize you at first, but it’s Ye Merrie Hamme-bone, surely? Yet I ought to have noticed the frill round your neck. . . . How’s Carlimero? Still in hell? And the bloke with the pickled face—let me see, what was his name? Rahusen, or something like that.”

The cynical merriment died out of the other’s face. He had drawn first blood, but now, to continue the boxing metaphor, he felt rights and lefts raining on him from all angles.

“You ought to know how Rahusen is,” he said in a low voice full of menace.

“I? I haven’t set eyes on the thug since I croaked his junior partner, that stinking Italiano. You were rather lucky in that direction, if you remember. And, by the way, I thought you were still at Dartmoor.”

The other man took a step forward.

"I shan't forget this," he declared.

Tiger frowned.

"Forget what? Forget that I allowed you to live, when you ought to be rotting in hell like your pal Carlimero? Out of my way!"

He walked ahead, completely disregarding his former enemy, who stood staring after him. At the door someone caught his eye. A likable youngster, but a complete stranger.

"Tiger Standish, isn't it?" queried this youth. "Excuse the familiarity—but I've seen you play footer."

The mention of football was an open sesame to Standish's heart.

"What can I do for you?" he enquired.

The other drew him on one side so that they were out of earshot.

"You might tell me who that fellow is you were jawing to just now?"

"Why?"

"If I told you the reason it would sound queer."

"Nothing would sound queer in connection with that blighter. He's a dead wrong 'un, kid—and if you have any connection with him, look out."

The other appeared grateful.

"Thanks a lot," he said. "I won't forget."

Sonia gave him an inquisitive glance as he rejoined her.

"I've been waiting at least a minute, old man," she stated.

"Sorry, darling. I met a bloke in there . . ." The next moment he could have bitten his tongue in two. Then came inspiration. "The worst of it was," he added, "the chap *would* talk football. I had difficulty in getting away. Really had enough?"

"Quite enough; I want to get home."

"Tidings of great joy! I feel rather that way myself."

They got into the taxi for which the commissionaire had already whistled (Benny Bannister had been sent some long before), and as the cab screeched its way

towards Piccadilly, Tiger held out his arms. Sonia came to them like a tired child seeking rest.

"I know I'm not playing the game, old man—but I *must* ask you one more question," she said.

"Carry on."

"Is it still—liver?"

He kissed her with a force that almost took her breath away.

"Cross my throat," he said, "but God's in His heaven and all's right with the world. Perhaps it's a bit of jealousy—who knows? I thought that you and Jack were the best-looking couple in the room tonight."

"That's because I wasn't dancing with you. Not that I would think of comparing myself with either the Dainton girl or——"

"You have no need to. You top the lot, my dear." He kissed her again, to the accompaniment of a scandalized stare on the part of an elderly gentleman who should have been in his bed hours before.

Sonia sat on his knee for the rest of the short journey, and told herself that she had no right to question in any conceivable way this wonderful husband of hers. And she was not going to; Tiger had never told her a lie since they had met—and it wasn't likely he was going to start the practice now. Away, foolish fears! And begone, grimacing doubts! She would not give house room to either any more. Tiger had told her that everything was all right, and she was perfectly satisfied.

Satisfied—until she saw the frown on his forehead as they stood in the hall preparatory to mounting the stairs.

Still she fought her mistrust, and quickly vanquished it.

"I'm all in, old man—I think I'll go straight up."

He appeared to seize on the suggestion.

"Do, darling," he replied. "I want a drink and a smoke first. Do you mind?"

She minded very much, really, but smiled at him in assent.

"Poor old boy! You haven't had a moment to yourself all day, have you? Go away and smoke your pipe."

He watched her walk slowly up the wide staircase before turning in the direction of his own room. He sighed as he opened the door and crossed the threshold; Sonia, with the uncanny intuition of a woman, had partly read his secret—he did want to be alone. Ever since leaving Sunningdale that afternoon he had had a passionate desire to be allowed to think uninterrupted; but until now no real opportunity had come.

Scarcely was he seated in the deep leather armchair to the right of the fireplace when a low purring sound was heard.

"Hullo, rascal!" he greeted.

A magnificent half-Persian cat reared itself on its hind-legs and begged like a dog.

"Come along, then."

The cat wanted no further bidding. With a graceful bound it landed on its master's knees, and, after putting up a clawless paw to pat Tiger's face, settled itself down to rest with a further diapason of pleasure.

Richard the Lion was a notable member of the Standish household. Petted by everyone from Sonia down to the scullery-maid, he invariably refused to go to bed until he had wished Tiger good night in person. A king in his own right, he refused to take food from anyone but Benny Bannister, who daily fussed over him with the same scrupulous care as he bestowed upon the Bentley.

With his left hand stroking the beautiful fur, Tiger, his pipe going well, gave himself up to the deepest meditation.

What were the facts? Rahusen, a monster rather than a man, who never threatened without cause, had been so confident of gaining his revenge that he had actually sent him a message warning him of the fact. "*First your father—then your wife—then YOU!*"

That was plain enough. What was still plainer,

from his experience of Rahusen, was that the master-crook had already perfected his plans for Round Two. If not, why the effrontery of that warning? Substantiation of this could be had, also, from the presence of Aubrey Hamme—cast out from Eton as a boy, and since an adventurer of the worst type—at the Centurions that night.

There was one thing he must do without delay: he must encourage his father by all means to take that two months' trip on the Continent. This question had been raised after dinner that night by the Earl, who, looking at his guests, had said: "I don't see any reason why you two young people shouldn't join me."

Sonia had jumped at the idea.

"Yes, let's," she said to Tiger.

He had been in a quandary. The thought of running away from the challenge which had been thrust at him was impossible. He scarcely remembered what excuse he had put forward—a pretty lame one, no doubt—and had received as a reward the puzzled expression of his father and even the more bewildered look on his wife's face. Poor Sonia! She had had a rough day.

Ignoring the Lion's protest, he deposited the cat on a sheet of newspaper before the fire, and commenced to walk up and down the room. Surely such a swine as Rahusen would not attack a cripple? But what was incomprehensible in the case of the ordinary man became a commonplace with Rahusen. Hadn't he had sufficient evidence of that in the past?

The telephone caught his eye. Too late to ring up now. But the image of stalking death hovering around the Lowndes Square mansion decided him.

Hastily running through the book, he asked Exchange for a number and waited impatiently.

It was at least a couple of minutes before an exceedingly angry voice shouted at him from the other end.

"Yes? . . . Who is it? . . . What do you want?"

"Sleeping, Sir Harold?" he enquired in a dulcet tone.

"Of course I was sleeping! What damned fool is that?"

"It's Tim Standish this end."

Judging from the confused sounds, Sir Harold Lellant, Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard, was struggling between a desire to hurl further curses at the speaker's head and a wish to laugh. Finally, the latter conquered.

"Blighted young ass!" came the chuckle. "What in the flaming tin hat do you mean by ringing me up at this hour of the morning?"

"I want you to be serious for a moment, sir."

"I am serious, confound you! Do you think it's any joke being called up like this? I thought the Prime Minister must be dead. Well, get on with it!"

If he expected a jesting reply he was considerably surprised, for the young man who was known as one of the best practical jokers of his time spoke like one who was grievously worried.

"It's about my father, Lellant."

"The Earl? Oh, that's a different matter. Nothing wrong, I hope?"

"Nothing beyond the fact that he's been threatened with death."

"Standish, you're joking!"

"No, I'm perfectly serious. That's why I rang you up. Is it too late to have a guard put round his house?"

"Certainly not. I'll ring up the Yard straight away. Can you give me any more details?"

"Not over the telephone. If you like, I'll come round and see you in the morning."

"Do, my boy." The speaker was now almost cordial. "Anything else?"

"Nothing—and I'm sorry to have worried you."

"My dear old fool," was the protest, "I'm only too pleased. That constable will be outside your father's house within five minutes from now."

"Thanks, Lellant."

After he had replaced the receiver, Tiger tried hard

to compose himself to sleep. This thing, serious as it threatened to be, must not be allowed to get on his nerves. That would never do. Rahusen was only human ; he had proved that once, and he would prove it again. If the fellow thought he could scare him with his Murder-in-the Red-Barn hokum——

The telephone by his side gently shrilled.

Damn ! Who could it be ? Sonia would be expecting him up.

"Yes ?" he called into the mouthpiece, and waited : waited to hear a satanic, mocking laugh—a laugh such as a human devil might have made.

It rang out clear and distinct for several seconds, sending a tingling shudder down his spine.

He found his voice, and with it his virile manhood.

"Hullo, Rahusen !" he said.

Another burst of demoniac mirth, louder and more strident—and then the line went dead.

CHAPTER IV

CROSS-EXAMINATION

THE sun was shining on that pleasantly arranged breakfast-table, but Sonia felt sad. Lowering her head, she looked down at her plate and sighed. Tiger stopped in the act of reaching for a piece of toast.

"And why?" he questioned.

"What do you mean, old man?"

"I heard you sigh, my girl. And let me tell you this: I won't have you making such squelchy little noises at the breakfast-table. It's not done in Chester Street."

"Good gracious me!" she shot back. "Did I sigh? How absurd!" She tried to reassure herself, to say that everything was all right and that there was no need for her to worry further; but the memory of her beloved husband's face as he had come into the room twenty minutes before had given her a distinct shock. Tiger was worried, and, what was worse, he would not tell her *why* he was worried. She had asked him, but he had put her off. Usually the essence of frankness, she could not understand this deception, innocent though it might be, and she was too proud to press him further; if he would not give her his confidence, that must be an end of it.

Up till now the conversation had been desultory. Tiger, on taking his seat, had picked up the morning paper, glancing idly at the various headlines and making casual comments on the day's news. This was more or less in accordance with his usual custom, but she had not been deceived. Tiger looked as though he had given

sleep a miss the night before. His astonishingly healthy face had lost a little of its colour, and there was something about his eyes which she could not understand. Oh, well ! But it was not in human nature—not in her human nature, at any rate—to let things go on like this. Ever since he had returned from that visit to Sir Lessington Cross he had been behaving in this peculiar manner. It was almost as though something had changed him. The difference might be subtle, but it was undoubtedly there.

She pushed aside her coffee-cup and looked across at him.

"Thought anything more about your father's trip ?" she asked.

He had been eating mechanically, like one in a reverie, but now laid down his knife and fork.

"Can't say I have, darling—why ?"

The words gave her a fresh sense of vexation.

"Have you overlooked the fact, old man, that your father wanted us to go along ?"

"Oh yes, I remember now. . . . Well, Sonia, *you* can, you know."

"I ?"

"Yes. Why not ?"

She spoke very definitely.

"I'm not going without you, Tiger. Fond as I am of your father, I want that to be clearly understood." Her voice rose two or three notes. "Why on earth can't you manage it, especially now that Cross has told you football is off ?"

He leaned back in his chair. Should he tell her ? Look at it which way he would, he was in a hell of a dilemma. Sonia's present beautiful outlook on life would be entirely changed if he passed on the information about Rahusen. On the other hand, it was devilishly tough work to maintain his present deception. Besides, curse it, his prevarications were bringing obvious pain to this girl he loved. Yet the thought of running away from the challenge which had been made him was entirely out of the question ; it just couldn't be done. He was

going to see if Rahusen was bluffing, and if he wasn't he was going to stand toe to toe with him and sock him to hell and back. For wasn't that an essential clause in the unwritten agreement between them?

Afraid now to come to a decision, he rose and walked round to her side of the table.

"I'll think about it, old girl," he said. "In the meantime, what do you intend to do this morning?"

"I don't know." Her tone was indifferent. What did life offer now that this hateful and totally unexpected cloud had come to darken her home?

"Why not have a few pals round and make whoopee?"

She stared at him as though he had suddenly gone mad.

"At this time of the day?"

He blushed beneath his tan.

"Fact is, my dear," he stammered weakly, "the old bean doesn't seem to be functioning too well just now. If I continue to utter these infantile idiocies, just put it down to my native dim-wittedness."

"What are you going to do yourself, Tiger?"

He flushed a second time.

"Oh, I've just got to run down to Whitehall and see a man."

"About a dog?"

"Yes," he replied, showing his teeth.

A great fear made Sonia's heart leap. She knew that look in her husband's face; it presaged trouble and foreboded disaster. It meant that he was contemplating a fight.

With whom? That was the question. But she had to know, and standing up she put her hands on his broad shoulders.

"Come clean, old man."

He picked her up in his great arms and crushed her to him. It seemed as though he never wanted to let her go again. She felt his heart beating against her breast and knew that all the love one woman could have from any man was hers. It reassured but did not satisfy.

"This will be the last time I shall ask you," she said.

"All right ; I'll come clean," he replied. "I love you—I love you—I love you." And then, kissing her lips, he set her down again.

"Shall be back for lunch," he called at the door.

A woman has to fight with what weapons she finds to her hand. In the ordinary way Sonia would have refused to use this present method, but her whole happiness was at stake and she was quickly becoming desperate.

"Tell Bannister I should like to see him," she said to the maid who answered her ring.

The bow-legged chauffeur ducked his head as he came into the room.

"Yes, m'lady ?"

She smiled at him.

"Sit down, Benny ; I want to have a talk with you."

"Yes, m'lady."

Benny propped himself precariously on the side of a chair and waited. His forehead became puckered at the first question.

"Benny, what's the matter with Tiger ?"

An extremely unconventional manner in which to speak of her husband to a servant, but these two understood each other. Sonia respected Bannister for the dog-like affection he bore to his master ; while Benny, in turn, thrusting aside all thought of jealousy, had welcomed this wonderful girl as a partner in the best of firms he knew existed in the whole wide world.

"What's the matter with the guv'nor, m'lady ?" he repeated.

"You heard what I said, Benny. I'm worried about him."

"But why, m'lady ?"

"Something happened yesterday. It was after he went to see Sir Lessington Cross. I have asked him, but he put me off, and I must know—I must know."

Her distress made Benny feel that he wanted to tear up trees by their roots. Next to Tiger, he would

have done more for his questioner than for any other living person.

"He seems a bit changed to me, too, m'lady."

"But why? Did anything happen yesterday?"

Bannister ran a hand through his sparse hair.

"Did he tell you about the note?" he returned.

"Note? What note?"

"Why, the note that feller gave me while I was waitin' for him to come out of the doctor's. I'll bet that's what did it, m'lady," the speaker went on triumphantly.

"You must tell me about that note, Benny."

"There isn't much to tell, m'lady. It was while I was waiting for the gov'nor to come out of the doctor's, as I've just told you. A man comes up and asks me if I'm Mr. Standish's chauffeur. When I says, 'Yes,' he pushes an envelope in me 'and, and says, 'Give that to him'—which I did, m'lady."

"Did Tiger read it?"

"Not then. He pushes it into his pocket as though it didn't matter, and began to talk about driving you down to Sunningdale. I can tell you what made the gov'nor so upset—it's what that doctor bloke told him about not being able to play football again this season."

She nodded perfunctorily, but Bannister could see that his words had little or no effect on her. She sat back in her chair as one stricken, her face pale and her beautiful hands clutching the arms as though she needed support.

"That's what it is, m'lady—I shouldn't worry if I was you."

She looked at him like one living a dream.

"All right, Benny."

He took it as a form of dismissal and tiptoed quietly to the door.

A note! That was the second letter that Tiger had received the day before. He had not mentioned the first, but the one that had been waiting on the seat of the car after they had got back from playing golf was

sufficiently mysterious. She had teased him about the possibility of it being from one of his girl friends, though there was no need for reassurance on this point, but it was strange that Tiger should not have told her its contents. She remembered now how quickly he had crunched the thing up and placed both envelope and its contents in his pocket. What was the mystery behind these two letters? This was the first time, she remembered again, that Tiger had ever kept his thoughts from her. What had happened?

CHAPTER V

THE MOLE IS ANGRY

COULD she have seen Tiger's face as her husband walked quickly down Whitehall on his way to Scotland Yard, Sonia's doubts would have been increased. He looked a man carrying an intolerable burden.

As he was passing the War Office, Standish turned swiftly round, his face convulsed and his hands clenched.

He had heard someone laugh—and it seemed to him to be the same kind of laugh that had come over the telephone wire late the previous night. But there was no one in the least degree suspicious-looking amongst the passers-by. He hurried on, feeling a fool.

Five minutes later he was shown into the private room of Sir Harold Lellant. The Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard rose with a smile from a desk that was covered with documents.

"Hullo, Standish," he greeted. "You're my first visitor this morning."

"I wanted to catch you before you settled down, Lellant."

"Very considerate. . . . Now, what's all the pother about?"

Tiger took some time in lighting the cigarette which the other had passed him. He knew quite well how to begin, but was more doubtful how to continue.

"I have arranged for a constable to be stationed outside your father's house from now on," prompted the Assistant Commissioner.

He swung his chair round in the manner of one not

only willing but eager to listen to a story. Like a diver who has hesitated on the spring-board, Tiger now plunged into his subject.

"What I told you over the 'phone last night, Lellant, was perfectly true," he said. "I have reason to believe that someone is threatening my father's life."

"But the Earl can't have an enemy in the world—surely?"

"It's not his enemy, Lellant—it's mine."

"And he's trying to hit at you through the old man—is that it?"

"According to the threats he's made."

The official pride of the Assistant Commissioner was roused.

"This sort of thing can't be allowed to go on. You'll have to tell me the rest, Standish. Who is the man? What's his name?"

Before the visitor could reply, the telephone on the desk rang.

"Excuse me a moment."

"Sir Harker Bellamy?" Tiger heard Lellant repeat. "Oh, show him up, of course. You know Bellamy, don't you?" he went on, after replacing the receiver.

Standish nodded. Hadn't he worked, before his marriage, with The Mole, as the chief of that important branch of the British Secret Service, Q.I., was known to his intimates? Hadn't Bellamy been intimately concerned in the First Round of his fight with Rahusen? But, all the same, he didn't feel inclined to bandy words with the Irascible One just then, for he guessed what Bellamy would say when he heard the reason for his visit to Scotland Yard that morning.

"Look here, Lellant, I'll be going. Thanks for all you've done."

The other rose and pressed him down into his chair again.

"You're doing nothing of the sort. If your governor is really threatened by some madman, Bellamy and I will pool forces. It's not often I lower my pride sufficiently

to go outside of the Yard for any help, but this seems to be an exceptional case. Sit still, man!"

They had not long to wait. The door opened shortly afterwards to admit a slightly-built, quick-moving man of late middle age. Sir Harker Bellamy might have been termed insignificant had he possessed another type of face—and an entirely different pair of eyes. The face was grey in tint and astonishingly grim in expression. The eyes were blue and amazingly cold. He looked what he was: a ruthlessly efficient official machine. Bellamy's fame was known throughout the chancelleries of Europe as well as in a thousand underground Continental dens.

"I see you're engaged, Lellant."

The speaker, polishing a monocle, raised it to one of those cold blue eyes. Through the glass he stared at Standish as though he were a complete stranger. The Mole evidently had not forgiven this young man for removing himself from his department six months before.

Lellant assumed his diplomat's smile.

"It's only Standish, and you know him, Bellamy, I believe?"

"We've met before," was the curt response; "but I can call again."

"If you're not careful I'll do to you what I've just done to Standish."

"What was that?"

"Why, pushed him back into his chair again. He was off like a rabbit out of a hole."

"Ah!"

Tiger felt his self-esteem pricking him.

"Not that I was afraid to meet you, Bellamy," he stated.

"Who said you were?" The eye behind the monocle flashed.

Sir Harold Lellant looked at the older man.

"If you're a good boy, Bellamy, I'll give you one of those cigars you like so much." He opened a drawer in his desk and fished out a cedarwood box. "Here you are," he said, thrusting it forward.

The Mole, slightly mollified, held the cigar up to his ear, and into his grim mask of a face there slowly flickered a smile.

"Umph !" he murmured, as he lit the weed.

"I'm glad you looked in this morning, Bellamy," went on the Assistant Commissioner. "Standish here was just telling me a rather remarkable story. Apparently his father's life has been threatened."

"What's that ?" The Chief of Q.I. swirled round as though an adder had bitten him. He was belligerence personified as he glared at the son of the Earl of Quorn. "And he comes to you for help !" he commented, looking now at Lellant.

The Assistant Commissioner ignored the sneer.

"Even poor old Scotland Yard sometimes has its uses, you know," he replied, unruffled. "But, as I was just saying to Standish, as this appears to be a special case, you and I might combine forces and see what can be done. The Earl is a friend of yours, I believe ?"

"Certainly he's a friend of mine. Who's threatening him ?" he enquired of Standish.

Tiger felt he wanted some relief from his nerve-racking thoughts, so he decided to throw a bomb.

"Rahusen," he said.

"*Rahusen !*" Bellamy sprang up like a clockwork figure. "Look here, Lellant," he continued without a pause, "this is entirely out of your hands now. It's become a matter for my department. Come, Standish."

So dominating was the personality of this little man that Tiger rose immediately. Although he had stopped working for Bellamy, this monster without bowels was exerting his old influence over him. He held out his hand to Lellant almost mechanically.

"I used to work for Sir Harker," he vouchsafed.

"Then why the hell didn't you tell me so before ?" was the retort. "I say, Bellamy——"

"Another time. I'm busy now."

The Chief of Q.I. was already at the door, holding it open for his former assistant to pass through.

"God save Mesopotamia !" cried Lellant, by way of commentary.

In the book-lined room which was so familiar Standish stood and faced his accuser—for this was the role which Sir Harker Bellamy had adopted.

"I didn't want to bother you with my affairs," he said, in answer to the vehement charge which had just been levelled at him. "Besides, when a man's life is threatened it becomes a matter for the police."

The monocle fell like a stone, to clash against a waistcoat button.

"Damn you for a fool, Standish ! Damn you for a double-branded fool ! Isn't the Earl my friend ? Used you not to work for me ?"

"I know, sir." The reply was almost humble.

Bellamy picked up a ledger-like book and hurled it into a corner of the room.

"In any case, how do you know that Rahusen is concerned in the business ?"

Tiger stretched his long form.

"I've had two notes from the fellow," he replied.

"Did he deliver them himself ?"

"Hardly, I think."

The Mole's grim face did not relax.

"Then how do you know they were from him ?"

"He signed one."

"You'd better tell me the whole story, young man."

There seemed nothing else for it, and so Standish narrated the peculiar events of the previous day and night. Crouched in his chair, with his hands folded in front of him, Bellamy listened until Tiger had come to an end. Then he glared at the speaker.

"Once again, why go to Scotland Yard ?" he barked.

"I've already told you. When a man's life is threatened it's the duty of the police to look after him."

"Yes, yes," was the impatient rejoinder ; "but Rahusen happens to be my pigeon."

Standish shook his head.

"Rahusen is *my* pigeon," he amended. "It's to me he sent his challenges, not to Q.I."

"You're splitting hairs," commented The Mole. "What's a damned sight worse, you won't face facts."

"I'm sorry if you're annoyed, Bellamy, but there's the situation. I'm not so ungrateful as to forget the help you gave me before, but this time I intend to see this thing through on my own. I should be a poorish sort of bloke if I didn't," he added.

A gleam came into Bellamy's cold blue eyes.

"That means, I take it, that you don't want my assistance?"

Tiger rose.

"Not at the moment. But many thanks."

The Mole also stood up. He had the manner of one who is going to be very rude.

"Then clear out of here," he said sharply. "I've some important work to do. You damned young fool," he went on, "you can't realize what you're up against. But let me tell you this: don't come whining to me when it's too late."

"When I start whining I'll let you know, Bellamy."

The door closed with a bang.

CHAPTER VI

THE TROUBLE-REMOVER

TIGER had still a good deal of time before he need return to Chester Street for lunch, and after walking through St. James's Park he turned into Piccadilly, sauntered through Bond Street, and came at length to a flat just off Manchester Square. The name

D. N. DALAMORE

on a small brass plate attracted him, and, climbing a few stairs, he rang a bell. A neatly attired maid gave him a smile in greeting.

"Mr. Dalamore in, Mary?"

"Yes, Mr. Standish. He's just finished with a patient."

She stood aside for him to enter, and Tiger caught the strains of a gramophone. It was a familiar sound.

He was shown into a large room that was well but curiously furnished. In the centre of this apartment was a raised couch. Over by the window was a handsome cabinet gramophone playing a spirited record. He had hardly turned from contemplating this when the door burst open and a man rushed up to him.

"Hullo, you old rascal! How are you?"

D. N. Dalamore, as has been said before,* was one of the most interesting men in London—just as the health clinic which he ran at this address was a meeting-place for an amazingly varied clientele. Dalamore, who made

* *Vivanti Returns.*

a good living out of keeping the human body fit, looked strong enough to wrestle with a gorilla—and in fact was. He was not merely an athlete himself, but was one of the soundest judges of human fitness in the whole of London.

An Australian, he had the true Colonial breeziness of manner. His frankness in speech and sound, common-sense views on keeping both men and women well had gained him a host of friends. One came to him as a client ; one remained as an admirer. A real man in every sense of the word, he had appealed to Tiger Standish from the first moment they had met.

"Busy?" now enquired Tiger.

"Not for ten minutes ; then I have another patient. Wait a minute and I'll turn off that gramophone."

When the room was quiet Dalamore settled himself into a chair and prepared to listen.

"In any trouble?" he asked. It was one of his many specialities to get people out of the mire, once they had stumbled in.

"I'm likely to be. Look here, Dalamore," went on the visitor quickly, "didn't I hear you mention something about jiu-jitsu once?"

"Quite likely. Why?"

"You're something of an adept, aren't you?"

"Well, I know a good deal about jiu-jitsu, although I don't have much cause to practise it now."

"Do you think you could put me up to a wrinkle or two?"

"Why, certainly, my boy." He sprang up, eager as ever to oblige a friend.

It was a quarter of an hour later. Dalamore's patient had been kept waiting for five minutes.

"Not that he'll mind. It's only old Welling, and he likes to talk to the missus. But, if it's not an indiscreet question——"

"I know exactly what you're going to say, and I don't mind telling you. I went along to Cross yesterday morning to get him to look over my knee. He told me that football was out of the question for at least three months.

He told me also that I should have to go slow in other directions. That means that I shall be handicapped to a great extent in any rough-and-tumble which may arise, and I'm pretty well certain, old boy, that a rough-and-tumble, or perhaps a series of rough-and-tumbles, and of a particularly nasty character, are due to crop up at any moment."

Dalamore expanded his really magnificent chest.

"Any chance of lending a hand?" he queried.

Tiger put a hand on his shoulder.

"My dear Dalamore, you're a married man and you've got your business to see to—certainly not."

The health expert, who had to content himself with watching all-in wrestling in the absence of anything personally exciting, sighed.

"Sometimes I wish myself back . . ." Then he checked himself, as though ashamed of giving utterance to such a secret thought. "Well, in any case," he concluded, "you ought to be able to give a good account of yourself after you've been along to me two or three times more."

"Make me another appointment," was the prompt answer.

Dalamore watched the broad back of his distinguished client disappear through the door with a feeling of regret. If all his patients were of that type! Instead, he spent the majority of his time welding sagging abdomens into more or less decent shape. Overweight men and women came to him with pendulous stomachs, and with ruthless and skilful hands he repaired the ravages done by over-eating, over-drinking, and disobeying the most elementary laws of health. A wit had once called him "the trouble-remover", and the title had stuck.

With a shake of the head he rang the bell. He must get back to his tummy-rubbing.

There was still another call Tiger had to make before turning finally in the direction of Chester Street: Quorn House now became his objective.

The Earl looked up from his invalid's chair.

"I know what you're going to tell me, my boy," he chuckled; "at least," he amended, "I know what I *hope* you're going to tell me."

Tiger shook his head.

"Sorry, old chap—damned sorry; but you shall have Sonia in lieu."

His father frowned.

"Talk sense if you can't do anything else," he said with a gruffness that was wholly counterfeit. "She won't come without you. It seems to me, my boy," went on the Earl, with one of the characteristic stares that proved so disconcerting to many people, "that my young friend Sonia wasn't altogether herself last night. She seemed to me to be a little *distracte*. Anything going wrong in Chester Street?"

Tiger realized that this was only another method of asking him point-blank what the devil was the matter.

"Oh, Sonia's all right—and she'll be delighted to go with you, governor, I'm absolutely sure."

"Well, if you think I'm going to be such a selfish swine as to allow her to waste her sweetness on an old fogey like me, you're mistaken. Oh, by the way," he went on before his son could interrupt, "Harker Bellamy was on the 'phone just now."

Tiger thrust his hands behind his back so that the Earl should not see them.

"Bellamy?" he repeated, with an affected indifference. "What did he want?" How dared The Mole take so much on himself?

"Nothing very much," replied the Earl, with an indifference that matched his son's. "He merely asked how you and marriage were getting on. He paid you the compliment of saying that he lost a very promising young man when you hitched up with Sonia."

"Like his confounded cheek."

"Of course, my boy. But you mustn't get annoyed with Bellamy: he's a good fellow in spite of his face. That looks like the end of the world and Judgment

Day combined, but his heart's in the right place ; we mustn't forget that."

"All I wish at this particular moment," countered his son, "is that Bellamy would slip absent-mindedly into the Thames and would go down for the third time without making any unnecessary fuss."

His father smiled.

"You don't mean a syllable of it," he commented.

"Is that all he said ?" Tiger went on to question.

The Earl looked at the glowing end of his cigarette.

"Practically all," he replied. "He added some nonsense to the effect that he had heard somebody or other say that that precious scoundrel Rahusen was back in London——"

If Tiger had not been prepared he must have betrayed himself.

"Ha, ha, ha !" he roared. "That's funny."

"You think it funny, Tiger ?"

Standish looked his father straight in the face.

"I think it funny for this reason, sir," he said. "If Rahusen had really come back to London I'm pretty certain that I should have been the first person to know."

"Yes." The Earl was evidently considering the point. Then he looked up, and the anxiety in his face tore at Tiger's heart. "And of course you haven't heard ?"

"Not a word, sir," lied his son. "How's the packing getting on ?" It was time the subject was changed.

"I shall be ready to leave in the morning—catching the eleven-fifteen from Victoria. Hargreaves and Manley will see to everything I want. Keep me posted, dear boy. I . . ."

The situation was rapidly becoming unbearable. Tiger took the outstretched hand of his father and gripped it so tightly that the old man unconsciously winced.

"Have a good time, sir," he said, trying to keep his voice steady ; and, stooping, he brushed the Earl's forehead with his lips.

CHAPTER VII

THE KNIFE-THRUST

LUNCH was over, but the silence which had fallen between the two continued.

"You want cheering up, old darling," announced Standish. "What shall it be—a *matinée* or a cinema?"

This was the voice of the man she loved, and Sonia could not resist it.

"Anywhere, as long as you are with me, old man," she replied.

Stupid, perhaps, for any girl—at least, any modern girl—to remain so crazily in love and show it; but throughout that morning the house had seemed a desert. She had gone into Tiger's den, trying to picture what life would be like without her husband. The room had been filled with his intense personal magnetism—to such an extent, indeed, that she had been overwhelmed. Looking at his pipes, his tobacco-jar, and other masculine oddments, all stamped so definitely with his personality, she found herself praying that nothing should ever come between them. Men changed—the best of them. . . .

But this was so disloyal as to be positively traitorous. There was no fear of Tiger changing in that way. If evil entered her heaven it must come through another agency.

As she turned to leave, a few words fell from her lips.

"O God, don't let any harm come to him. . . ."

Now, as he smiled at her across the table, it seemed impossible to credit that even the most malignant fate

could do her beloved man an injury. The sight temporarily swept away all her fears.

"Oh, Tiger," she said, "Maurice Chevalier! He's at the Carlton."

Her husband drained his coffee-cup and laid it down.

"And am I to sit quietly by whilst the wife of my bosom leans forward in her seat to look into the eyes of a Frenchman whose underlip is much too big? All right, Sonia, let's go."

Like most of the Chevalier pictures, this was an artistic gem. It combined subtlety of story with wonderful photography and masterly production. But it was the comedy element which appealed mainly to them both. Sonia, listening to Tiger's baying laugh, groped for his hand and felt her fingers squeezed. God was in His heaven and all was right with the world—hadn't Tiger himself sworn that the day before?

Followed one of the most delightful domestic scenes which can only take place in a home that is united by love. They had a late tea in Tiger's den—with Richard the Lion, the half-Persian, raising himself dog-like on his hind-legs to beg for his share. Dick's tea took the form of milk slightly coloured with tea, but he ate his bread and butter like any human.

"Come on, then, you scoundrel," encouraged Standish, and the cat, purring like a dynamo, leapt on to the extended forearm and from there found his way to his master's right shoulder, where, after treading water for a moment, he settled himself with complete assurance.

"Doctor Nikola," chaffed Sonia.

"The Hermit of Chester Street—Complete with Cat," returned her husband. "Happy, darling?"

"Perfectly." For now the shadows had fled.

"Then I'll tell you something: the governor's leaving Victoria at eleven-fifteen tomorrow morning. He's forgiven me for not going with him. I offered you, but he said he wouldn't allow you to waste your sweetness on the desert—no, that's not right—on such an old fogey as

himself. Seriously, old dear, I believe he will be perfectly all right with Manley and Hargreaves—at least, he said he would. But wouldn't you really like to go along?"

She shook her head.

"You know my views, Tiger." In her eyes was an entreaty which he could not resist. He must tell her something. It could not be the truth, of course; but a lie, it seemed, would be better than nothing.

"Well, here goes, then," he said. "Bellamy wants me to hang on in London for a while."

She rose, biting her lip.

"You'll look after yourself, old man?" But before he could reply she had swiftly left the room.

The frown was still on Tiger's face as he turned the corner into Lowndes Square. Ever since dinner he had had the presentiment that something was wrong. Rahusen's spy system appeared to be well organized—and if he knew that the Earl of Quorn was leaving for the Continent on the next morning, he might make some attempt that night.

Anyway, he had to see that the old boy was safe.

What was that? A dark shape was lying on the pavement outside Quorn House. He broke into a run. Now he was able to see that it was a man dressed in police-constable's uniform.

His heart racing, Tiger bent over him to see the handle of a dagger protruding from the policeman's throat. The weapon had been driven into the flesh right up to the hilt.

Tiger felt his heart thrumming madly as he continued to stare at this grim exhibit, and one fact rose above all others: this poor devil of a policeman had been the guard appointed by Sir Harold Lellant to keep watch over his father's safety. A few minutes before, perhaps, he had been alive and well. Then had come, out of the night, his assassin—probably in the guise of a well-dressed

man, silk hat on head, silk muffler round neck—a returner home, on the surface, from theatre or bridge party.

He could visualize it clearly.

"Got a match, officer?" the man had asked.

As the constable, anxious to oblige, had lowered his right hand to fumble in his pocket, that devilishly clever thrust with the knife . . .

The weapon, as Tiger continued to look at it, fascinated him; but he must not touch it: there was just a possibility of finger-prints on the hilt. A small chance, he decided, but he must allow for it.

Who had done this fiendish killing? Rahusen! He could imagine the mirthless, horrible grin on that death-like face. Rahusen was congratulating himself at that very moment, no doubt, upon drawing first blood in this opening round of their Second Encounter.

"What's this?" demanded a voice, and, turning, Tiger saw a police sergeant staring unblinkingly at him. The office's manner was menacing.

"I'm afraid it's something unpleasant," he heard himself say.

"Something unpleasant, eh? . . ."

And then the slightly sarcastic comment was followed by an exclamation which scorched the surrounding air.

"Who did it?" he roared, pushing his thoroughly commonplace, livid, but honest face close to that of Standish. "Come on, spit it out! Because, if you don't, toff or no toff, I swear to God I'll punch the life out of yer!"

Apart from the crude belligerence of his attitude, the speaker had been eating onions. But Tiger kept his temper; this was too serious an occasion to lose one's head.

"I would give you five hundred pounds if you could tell me that," he replied.

The sergeant looked again at the dagger-handle protruding from the side of the dead policeman's neck.

"Jim Davis," he muttered. "Jim Davis—and he was going to be married in a week's time. . . ."

He swung round again.

"Who are you—and what're you doing here?"

The famous imperturbability of the London policeman had been blown to the winds. The sergeant had almost lost complete control of himself.

"I'm the Earl of Quorn's son; this is his house," pointing to the left, "and I was just going to call on my father, when——"

"You didn't see anyone running as you came round the corner?"

"No one. The square was empty except for this constable."

His questioner fidgeted with the collar of his tunic.

"Was he—like this when you came up?"

"Yes, sergeant. I didn't notice that anything was wrong at first, but when I spoke to him and he didn't answer——"

"Poor b——, how could he?" exclaimed the sergeant.

Tiger turned to leave.

"My name is Standish, and I live at 215 Chester Street, Grosvenor Place," he said. "I have told you what little I know."

The sergeant continued to appear stupefied. After all, Standish reflected, there was some excuse for the fellow. Policemen are not found every night of the week foully murdered in West End squares.

"Where are you going now, sir?"

"I've already told you my father lives here; he's an invalid, and I'm calling to see how he is before he leaves for the Continent tomorrow."

As he made the announcement he dropped his voice. After that night's amazing proof of Rahusen's power, a whole corps of eavesdroppers, invisible to the eye, did not seem out of the question.

The sergeant appeared to regain his normality. That first galvanizing shock had passed. Here was a highly sensational crime, and he had to get on with his job.

"I suppose you know, Mr. Standish," he said, "that

this constable had been detailed to keep a watch over your father's house?"

"Yes, I know that, sergeant. But listen to me for a moment: if my father, who, as I have already told you, is an invalid, was told that this had happened tonight, he—well, it would have a very serious effect upon his health. Is there any reason why he should be informed?"

"That's up to the inspector. . . . I must use the telephone."

Tiger reflected for a moment.

"That will be all right. Come on in with me; but I must ask you to be discreet."

"I've got to do my duty," he replied and, taking a police whistle from his pocket, he blew loudly.

In what seemed an incredibly short space of time a policeman came running round the corner. He listened, pop-eyed, to the story told by the sergeant, and then took up a position by the side of the dead man. The sergeant reflected for a moment.

"We can't leave that there in any case," he said; "he will have to be taken into the house. It won't be for long," he added. "I'll ring up straight away for an ambulance after I have spoken to the inspector."

"Very well," rejoined Tiger, seeing that there was no way out. Hargreaves could be trusted, he knew.

The butler, after a short conflict with his nerves, maintained his usual poise.

"The Earl went to bed an hour ago," he said to the anxious Tiger.

"You understand, Hargreaves, that he must not be told anything about this?"

"Of course not, sir."

Waiting there in the hall whilst the sergeant did his telephoning, Tiger reminded himself of an obvious duty. If Rahusen could have a policeman killed . . . But when he quietly opened the door of his father's bedroom he heard a reassuring sound: a steady, rhythmic breathing. Tiptoeing to the side of the bed, he looked

down on the face he loved. The Earl was sleeping the untroubled sleep of a child.

"Thank God !"

Returning to the hall, he drew Hargreaves aside.

"I want you to stay in my father's room tonight, Hargreaves—no, I can't tell you the exact reason, but let it go that it's vitally important. In fact, I don't want you to let the Earl out of your sight until he is on the train tomorrow morning."

The butler's manner signified that he would have liked to ask a series of questions ; but the habits of a lifetime of service prevailed.

"Very good, Mr. Timothy," he replied.

CHAPTER VIII

A LOOK INTO THE PAST

THERE was a smile on Sonia's lips as she prepared for bed. How ridiculous she had been to think anything could possibly have happened to mar her happiness! Why, Tiger had been sweetness itself that day—quite his old, delightful, inimitable self: the finest man she had ever met or ever would meet! The luck which was hers in being loved by him! . . .

Beautiful as was the picture reflected by the mirror, she told herself she was not worthy of the most splendid man of his generation. And as for that other thought—that Tiger stood in any danger—why, it was even more preposterous than the first! Hadn't he emerged triumphantly from that desperate affray six months before, in which he had been literally surrounded by enemies? Where was her pride in him, where her spirit? With a motion of her hand she pushed aside all doubts as though they were tangible objects.

Getting into bed, she switched off the light and lay in that borderline which fringes sleep. Every moment she expected to hear her husband's cheery call from the next room; and, perhaps because his return was so long delayed, she found herself after a while being attacked once again by the same strange fears as had beset her that morning.

From out of the darkness the face of the man who had made her life a thing of terror only a few months back seemed to leer in triumph. Every episode of the strange series of circumstances which had brought her, after so

much travail, to Tiger Standish's arms stood out in bold relief. She saw herself first of all keeping house for her stepfather, Simon Lavinger, in that small Berkshire village of West Deane. She had not been particularly fond of Lavinger, and had consequently not experienced much regret at his end—terrible as that was. They had never really got on well together, and if she had followed her own wishes she would have left him long before. But her mother, who had died seven years previously, had asked her towards the end to stay with him, and it was in accordance with this promise that she had stifled her own wishes.

Simon Lavinger's natural bad temper and irritability had increased perceptibly during the last few months of his life. These flaws in his character had not just worried her, but had given her cause for wonderment—her stepfather followed an interesting as well as an extremely well-paid occupation: he was a valuer, and was stated to be a very sound judge of old furniture, *objets d'art*, paintings, and jewels. Fortunately, he would be away sometimes for as long as a month at a time, so she had some respite from his frequently recurring attacks of extreme nervous irritability.

It had been on one Friday night, after Simon Lavinger returned from a week's absence, that she had suggested calling in the local doctor. Her stepfather's condition was so bad that she had considered this necessary. But Simon Lavinger had become furious at the suggestion, had told her to mind her own business, and had added that he hated all medical men.

She had felt that the crisis was approaching—and had proved herself right; for late that evening a car drove out, and a man huge in size and vaguely repulsive in appearance had asked to see her stepfather. It was the first time she had seen this man, whose name proved to be the slightly comic one of Hamme, and even if Simon Lavinger had not evidenced such unmistakable fear when he was shown into the room, she would have known that he was an enemy. He seemed to carry an atmosphere

with him, an aura of evil—and this in spite of his fresh-coloured complexion and suit of sporting tweed.

After showing the visitor in, she had been told by her stepfather to leave the room and on no account to enter it again until the interview between the two was over. She had waited on the tiptoe of expectancy, anticipating some evil, although she could not guess what form the latter might take; and after about half an hour Hamme knocked on the sitting-room door. He seemed in a very jovial frame of mind, as though the business on which he had called had been satisfactorily arranged.

"I've got a message for you, Miss Devenish," he had told her, putting on his heavy motoring-coat. "Your stepfather wants you to be kind enough to take him in a whisky-and-soda in about ten minutes' time. Will that be all right?"

Of course she had said, "Yes," turning quickly away because she did not like the look in the man's eyes. She was more positive than before that this visitor must be a criminal of some kind. He held out his hand in leaving, but she had been unable to bring herself to touch it, and directly he was gone she rushed to the door of the room which her stepfather used as a kind of combined office-study. Her brain was in a whirl; she felt that Hamme had been merely mocking her, that there was a sinister meaning behind what he had said. Somehow—she could not have explained exactly why—she expected to find the door locked; but it was not and, forgetting everything but her premonition of tragedy—for that was what it amounted to—she walked into the room.

The next moment she had raised her hands to her eyes in the vain endeavour to shut out a horrible sight. She had expected tragedy, and she found it: *hanging from a hook in the ceiling was her stepfather, and he was dead!*

Old Dr. Simmons, to whose corner house she had immediately rushed, tried his hardest to persuade her that it was a case of suicide, but she had been unable

to believe him. Although her stepfather had proved himself such a coward in so many ways during the years she had lived with him, she found it impossible to credit that he had been able to summon up enough courage to take his life. No, Simon Lavinger had been murdered, and the hand that had done it belonged to the huge caller who had behaved with such astonishing sang-froid.

But the verdict at the inquest which was held shortly afterwards had been "suicide whilst of unsound mind", and, with this placed on the public records, she tried to follow Dr. Simmons' advice and forget everything about the tragedy.

She had much to be thankful for. She was now a free agent and could do what she liked with her life. There were no further responsibilities—no more having to bite her tongue to keep back words of bitter reproach which so often she felt justified in uttering.

But she found that fresh troubles arrived after her stepfather's death. The man Hamme, at the inquest, had given evidence to the effect that he was a collector and that he had sometimes employed her stepfather as a buyer of works of art. That was the reason he had called at the cottage on the night of the tragedy. Hamme had gone on to say that Mr. Lavinger, with whom he had been on terms of friendship for some time, had confided in him that he had consulted a famous Leeds specialist about his health a day or so before he returned home, and that the specialist had told him he was suffering from an incurable disease of the liver, which could only mean that he had but a few months to live. It was mainly on this account, no doubt, that the coroner had advised the jury to bring in a verdict of suicide whilst of unsound mind.

She had felt this stigma on her stepfather's character because she still could not bring herself to believe that Simon Lavinger had taken his life. There was evidence for that belief in the letter she found was written on the very night the valuer left on what was to prove his last

journey. In this letter, which she did not discover until after the inquest, he had told her that he might never return home because he was a "marked man". It was due to this cause that he had suffered from those bouts of temper and nerves. A little later, in the same letter, he had given her what he described as a "solemn warning". His enemies would be her enemies after his death, he added. There were three of them, all joined together; two of their names were Hamme and Carlimero. He didn't know the name of the third, who was the most important of the trio, but he was the person at the back of everything. "A terrible man, I feel sure, although I have never met him."

After stating that if his fears were realized she must get into immediate touch with his solicitor, a man named J. A. E. Morton, whose offices were at 425 Queen Street, Kingsway, the writer of the letter had added a postscript. The words of this were underlined, and ran: *On no account go to the police: it would be fatal.*

She had faithfully obeyed this injunction, although there had been many reasons for her not doing so. The first of these had been an attempted burglary at the cottage, during which a favourite dog had been poisoned. Then, after she had left home on a visit to some friends in the North, she found on her return that every room had been turned upside down, special attention being devoted to her dead stepfather's office. Nothing valuable had been stolen so far as she had been able to ascertain, and as for the valuer's papers, all these had been taken care of by his solicitor. But it had been very disturbing, staying on in the cottage after that outrage. She had felt that everything was tainted and polluted. The strain in the end had been too much, and when a woman she knew, who was a fashion and gossip-writer for one of the London newspapers, had invited her to come up to town and stay with her, she had accepted. Indeed, things by this time were pretty bad, because what little money she had possessed was practically gone.

There had been a fresh mystery about her stepfather's

affairs. Although living carefully, he had never given any hint of being penurious, and she had naturally assumed that he had saved at least a fair sum. But when Mr. Morton, the solicitor, had gone into his estate, he found that the valuer had died practically penniless.

In the excitement of getting a job through her friend Mrs. McArther, who wrote under the name of "Prunella" in the columns of the *Morning Meteor*, she had temporarily forgotten her troubles. In a surprisingly quick space of time she had actually achieved fame as a mannequin, being "written up" by one of the sensational morning newspapers as "the most beautiful model girl in London". But peace was not hers for long. The Three, as her stepfather had called them, got on her track—why was a complete mystery. They sent her letters, threatening her, as well as telephone messages. Both were to the effect that they could send her to prison if they so desired. Of course, this had been the most outrageous nonsense, because she had done nothing of which she need be ashamed. But it appeared that Simon Lavinger's enemies had come to the conclusion that he had passed on to her something which they valued—something which they were also determined to obtain. Once again she was in the dark; what this something was she could not conceive.

Then, one afternoon, just as she was turning the corner outside Hélène's, where she worked, a man had stepped from a car—he must have been following her.

"Miss Devenish," he had said, "I am from The Three.* This is to tell you that they want to see you. You will receive a telephone message tomorrow, stating the time and place."

With that her nerve had completely snapped. Alone in her tiny flat that night she wondered perplexedly what she should do. The obvious thing, of course, was to have gone to the police, but that was ruled out by her

* *Tiger Standish.*

stepfather's strict instruction. Even though he was dead, she felt bound to respect his wishes.

Then she had seen a photograph on the front page of the *Evening Standard*. It had shown the attractively ugly features of a man of twenty-six or so, a likable grin on his face, and an expression in his eyes which would have given anyone confidence. It gave her not merely confidence but hope. After reading what was printed beneath the photograph, she went to her writing-desk, pulled paper and pen towards her, and wrote :

Dear Mr. Standish,

All the world is calling you a sportsman. If you are what the newspapers assert that you are, would you be willing to help the writer, who is in very desperate trouble ?

I am a girl alone in London, surrounded by enemies.

I have no time to write further details, but intend to call upon you at 9.30 tonight—that is, half an hour after I expect you will receive this letter by post—to see if you will give me a short interview. You are my only hope.

She had signed it "S. D."

She must have been followed once again after leaving the flat, for on reaching Portland Place, her destination, a man had jumped out from a car and had endeavoured to kidnap her. But whilst she was struggling desperately, a stranger had rushed from a doorway, had thrown himself on the man, and the next thing she remembered was being in a sumptuously furnished room, looking up at her rescuer, who was smiling down in what appeared to be perfect contentment. One look was sufficient : the stranger was the Tiger Standish to whom she had addressed her strange appeal.

Some weeks of hectic excitement had followed. She had been a pawn in a most desperate game of cut and thrust, of keen wits and ruthless cunning, of violent assaults and courageous counter-attacks. After listening to her story Tiger had constituted himself her champion

—and then, after fighting at desperate odds in her service, he had, characteristically enough, asked her to marry him.

In that First Round he had fought with The Three one casualty had been recorded: Tiger had killed the Italian, Carlimero, with his own hand. As a result of the feud, the attention of the authorities had been drawn to Carlimero's two associates, the giant Hamme and the mysterious Rahusen, the Man with the Dead Face, who commanded this Trinity of Evil. Rahusen had employed strategy, leaving the country and allowing the honours to pass to his opponent; but one night her lover—as he was then—had received a letter, the contents of which he had kept exclusively to himself. What that letter had contained she did not know; but now, as she lay gripped by a fresh fear, she realized that it must have been a parting taunt—or perhaps a challenge—from Rahusen.

Had Rahusen returned? Was that the secret of the two notes addressed to Tiger which, like the first, he had kept entirely to himself? Why had she not thought of this before? Because of her, he was to find himself in fresh and perhaps even more deadly peril. She would have to ask him directly he returned. But how the minutes dragged! She looked at her watch on the small table by the side of the bed, and saw that it was nearly midnight. Tiger had said that he was going out for only half an hour. Where had he gone—and what was he doing?

She waited in an agony of suspense for his familiar step, feeling that death was hovering near. Finally she heard the door of her husband's room open.

"Tiger, darling!" she called.

The man she loved had a perfectly ridiculous but lovable habit of yodelling, and he broke into a stave now. The preposterous sound vibrated through the room, as he stood in the doorway, looking across at her.

"I stayed out longer than I intended to—naughty!"

"Oh, Tiger!" was all that she could reply, and even when his arms were about her, holding her close, she could

not quite reassure herself that everything was all right. "I got frightened," she whispered.

"Frightened? Of what, my sweet?"

She dared not tell him.

"Of burglars—I mean burglars, hard-boiled and bilious?"

"No, no," she laughed.

He unloosed one arm from her silk-clad shoulder and sat down on the side of the bed.

"I'll tell you what it is, old thing: you want a holiday; why not go off with the governor? By the way, that's where I've been—I just had to make sure that he was fit for the journey. He's leaving, as I think I told you, by the eleven-fifteen from Victoria tomorrow morning. You've only to say the word—and I'll pack for you myself!"

She shook her head. Confirmation of her misgivings had come in every syllable of his voice. It was like Tiger to make light of danger; it was like him to want her out of the way so that he could have a clear stage. But, whatever threatened, it was impossible to leave him—for a single hour, let alone the three months that the Earl of Quorn had arranged to be out of England. Should she tell him what she knew? No; she had to show bravery herself; she must play the same game as her husband. To go about with a song on her lips when dread was in her heart would be hard—very hard; but, according to her code, she had to do it.

"I'm always afraid when you are not with me," she told him.

He laughed—a little unsteadily.

"I'll let you into a little secret," he replied. "Someone—I won't tell you who—told me today that I had a wife in a million. 'One million?' I said. 'Ten million!'"

Time stood still while they kissed.

CHAPTER IX

THE BLACK-LIST

THIS, the fanciful-minded might have said, was a room for smiling, and the man who now replaced the telephone receiver, after listening to the words that had come to him over the wire, permitted himself the pleasure. It had been good news, and he signalized the fact in the manner peculiar to the majority of mankind.

A very pleasant-featured individual, this, the casual observer would have remarked. The fattish cheeks were illumined by a pleasant glow. The mouth, it is true, was somewhat sensual; but then, good living tends to give a man that effect, and if the appointments of this extremely artistic apartment were anything to go by, the occupant believed in doing himself well.

Church Street, Mayfair, is the natural habitat of the modern type of *bon viveur*. The two windows overlooking the street were luxuriously curtained; the carpet was a fine Aubusson, and any connoisseur of Sheraton would have looked upon the chairs with an acquisitive eye.

Although the weather did not really warrant it, a cheerful log fire, giving off an aromatic fragrance, burned in the open hearth. On the left of the easy chair to which the man now betook himself was a small table whose contents added to the general cheerfulness of the room. A decanter containing whisky was flanked by a box of Corona cigars, whilst a siphon of soda-water awaited attention.

Altogether, an apartment the general appearance

of which would have caused a visitor to feel immediately at home. A room, in short, to welcome any guest. And the man who entered shortly afterwards at the heels of a servant looked about him with appreciative eyes.

"Very nice indeed," he remarked ; walking over to the small table, he helped himself liberally to whisky.

There must have been some clashing note somewhere, however, for his host regarded him with an angry glance.

"Who told you to come here ?" he demanded.

The words, harshly uttered, did not coincide with the pleasant expression that had been on his chubby face a few moments before ; but the other was not dismayed.

"My dear fellow," he quickly retorted, "what a way to greet an old friend—and a present colleague ! Where's the risk, in any case ? And you wanted to be put to a severe test, I take it ? My hat !" He stopped to laugh uproariously. "How you've changed ! If I hadn't known——"

He was brusquely interrupted.

"That will do. You always did talk too much, Hamme."

The chastised one lowered his great bulk into a companion easy chair, but the wonderment in his eyes persisted.

"God, it's marvellous !" he commented. "Absolutely marvellous. Whoever the fellow was, he's a genius."

For a second time he was sharply pulled up.

"I don't want to listen to any more compliments. You came here with some news, I take it ?"

Aubrey Hamme drained half the contents of his glass.

"News ?" he repeated. "I should say so ! Standish has got married, if you please, and I met him and his wife at the Centurions Club in Bond Street last night. He sent his kind regards."

If he expected to witness any astonishment he was

disappointed: the chubby-faced one merely gave a barely perceptible nod.

"Do you think I've been in London for forty-eight hours without knowing that?" he said contemptuously.

Had he gone on to speak freely, he could have told his caller some further astonishing news; but he merely frowned into the fire as though considering a problem. And this man Hamme represented a problem. He did not know if he had been wise in allowing himself to receive him. The fellow presented danger—and danger of a very positive kind. Six months before* he had been associated with Hamme in a matter which had ended disastrously. True, he had got clear away himself, leaving Hamme to bear the main responsibility. Only the fact that a very prominent alienist had pronounced the prisoner not to be responsible from a medical point of view for his actions had saved Aubrey Hamme from going to prison for a long term. But the police, it was pretty certain, would be keeping Hamme under their eye; that would mean that anyone with whom he was seen associating would also automatically become suspect.

Yet Hamme had his uses. He could not forget that fact. He had been useful in the past, and promised to be even more useful in the future. Yet . . .

"You don't seem very pleased to see me," broke in the other.

The man who had entered England with a Dutch passport that carried the name of a perfectly respectable and wealthy Amsterdam merchant called Hans de Boo, turned in his chair.

"You realize the risk, I suppose, in coming here tonight?"

The visitor lifted a protesting hand.

"But I had to see you. Damn it, if we're going to continue to work together I must see you."

"You should have waited until I communicated."

"Oh, all right. Bit up-stage, aren't you?"

* *Tiger Standish.*

And then the merriment of Hamme could no longer be kept in restraint: he broke into a second of his uproarious laughs.

"My God, it's marvellous!" he repeated. "Absolutely marvellous!"

"Control yourself, you fool."

Here was the voice of one who had to be obeyed, and the caller's sense of humour suddenly collapsed.

"I should have thought that you would have been glad to know how impossible it was for anyone to recognize you."

"I did not need you to assure me of that fact. Tell me everything that transpired between you and Standish last night. The Centurions is a respectable club, isn't it?"

Hamme, who as a schoolboy had been expelled from Eton and his name expunged from the oak wall of one of its classrooms, ignored the thrust.

"There are few places I can't get into," he replied. "Well, I was standing in the lobby, when who should come up but Standish? I started to chip him a bit, and he got annoyed. He asked me about Carlimero, and wanted to know if he was still in hell."

"So!" came from the other in a sibilant whisper.

"Yes, but wait a minute—there's a bit more. Do you know what he called you? The Bloke with the Pickled Face. If he could see you now——"

A third explosion of mirth threatened, but was summarily cut short by the sight of those full, sensual lips being drawn back to display a mouthful of clenched teeth.

"What did you say?" asked de Boo.

"Why, I pretended not to understand, of course. 'You ought to know how Rahusen is,' I told him. To cut it short, I'm afraid we didn't part the best of friends."

"There was nothing more?"

"Nothing worth repeating."

"All right. Thank you for the information. Now think you had better go; I'm expecting a visitor."

Hamme contorted his face so that his naturally pig-like eyes became almost obscured.

"I'm just to hang about awaiting instructions—is that it?" he enquired.

"I will let you know when I want you," was the concise reply.

"Righto. Well, good night." He tried to make his voice sound cool.

"One moment," said de Boo.

"Yes?"

"The less you talk the better," he was advised, and with this veiled threat ringing in his ears the visitor crossed the sumptuous Aubusson carpet, reached for the handle of the door, and departed stormily.

As for the man who had given him his instructions, he selected a cigar, tore off one end with his strong teeth, lit it, and gave himself up to reflection. After he had taken but a few puffs, however, he raised himself from the chair and looked searchingly into the glass over the mantelpiece. Yes, Hamme no doubt had been right: not one in a million would have been able to recognize him. That fellow in Berlin had done his work well.

He sat down again, feeling satisfied. The mental processes of Hans de Boo would have provided the material of an absorbingly interesting treatise for any psycho-analyst who really understood the human mind. Possessed of such wealth as would have enabled him to lead a life of luxurious pleasure for the rest of his days, he had elected to return to the country from which he had been banished in order to satisfy an abnormal craving to kill. This blood-lust was mastering him now. But instead of endeavouring to fight the passion, he surrendered to it, and the man to whom Aubrey Hamme had recently been referring was his intended victim. When he left England six months before, he had sent the son of the Earl of Quorn a message saying that he would return; and now that he had returned, he must live up to his pledge.

Lost in his reverie, he did not notice the servant standing by his side until the man coughed.

"What is it?" he then asked.

The man, without speaking, handed him a visiting-card. One glance, and he rose from his chair.

"Show him in," he ordered.

The second visitor to Hans de Boo that night was an immaculately dressed individual of early middle-age. Although he was definitely not British, it was almost impossible to state clearly to what exact nationality this person belonged. He might have been born in any one of half a dozen European countries, but his clothes without any possible doubt had been fashioned in Savile Row. His manner was precise, convincing, and authoritative.

"I have brought you the list," he stated without preamble.

Handing the other a paper on which were a number of names, he watched de Boo scrutinize it closely.

"It shall receive my attention," he was assured.

The other bowed.

"Please understand, we at the Embassy accept no responsibility. You act entirely on your own."

This time it was Hans de Boo who inclined his head.

"That is the way in which I prefer to work," was the supposed Dutchman's answer.

"Then everything is clear between us. There is no need for me to wait?"

"No need at all. But thank you for calling."

If there was an ironic edge to the words the visitor ignored it. He had fulfilled his mission and was now thinking longingly of a certain cosy flat not far from the Haymarket, where a lady whose virtue could be bought for a price was awaiting him.

"Good night," he said.

"Good night."

When he was alone de Boo studied the paper again. It was a black-list, for those whose names were on it had been marked down by a certain European Power for

early death. He was to be the assassin. Prominent in the list was the chief of a certain British Secret Service department.

"Sir Harker Bellamy," murmured de Boo to himself—and broke into a quiet but horrible laugh.

CHAPTER X

DECLARATION OF WAR

AMONGST the many interesting spectacles which London, the world's most interesting capital, can provide is the daily departure of the boat train from Victoria Station. This morning provided no exception to the rule. The fortunate ones who were going south were being bidden farewell by their friends and relations. The sight would have proved a fascinating one to any student of human nature.

The Earl of Quorn, after being assisted into his seat, smiled at the tall, stalwart young man who had come, in company with a remarkably pretty girl, to wish him *bon voyage*.

"Take good care of that wife of yours, Tim, my boy, or she will be running away from you."

The speaker's eyes twinkled in characteristic manner as he uttered the warning.

"I'll take the chance, sir," was the equable answer.

With Sonia's hand in his, what other reply could Tiger have given?

"If he bores you too much, come south to me, my dear," went on the Earl.

Sonia was looking especially lovely that morning, and Standish had a devilishly queer feeling inside when his eyes caught hers. If Rahusen ever laid a finger on this wife of his he would tear him into small pieces.

Before the train started, Tiger had a word with his father's powerfully built valet.

"I shall hold you responsible for his lordship's safety,

Manley," he said, and it was not until he saw the man's eyes widen that he realized he had spoken incautiously.

"Safety, sir?"

"I should have said comfort."

The valet's face lost some of its perplexity.

"Hargreaves and me will see to that, sir," he replied.

"Just one other thing, Manley—see that my father does not form any undesirable acquaintanceships. There are a good many funny characters knocking round the Continent, you know."

The man's wide mouth split itself into a comprehensive grin.

"You can't tell me anything about *them*, sir; I used to be with the Duke of Eastdale."

As His Grace had lived the most rackety existence of anyone of his generation for twenty-five years, and apparently thrived on it, the answer was comprehensive.

Manley now drew Standish on one side.

"I'll look after his lordship every minute of the time we're away," he said convincingly. "You needn't have a worry about anything, sir."

"Bring him back safe and sound and there will be a hundred pounds for you."

"I'd have done it without that," replied the valet before turning away.

A couple of minutes later the boat train glided out of the station to the accompaniment of such a storm of handkerchief-waving that one might have supposed it was washing-day in the Grand Fleet.

Sonia, with the suspicion of a tear in each eye, caught her husband's arm.

"You didn't really want me to go, Tiger?"

"Of course not!" he replied instantly. Yet even as he spoke the cheerful picture of the Continental platform as he had looked at it a second before was blotted out and he saw instead a policeman lying strangely still. . . .

It was in order to distract his thoughts that he drew Sonia over to the big bookstall.

"Anything decent to read?" he asked the pleasant-featured man who appeared to be the manager.

Like the good salesman he was, the latter produced a number of new novels.

"All kinds here, sir," he said, "from Aldous Huxley down to dear old Edgar Wallace—or the other way round, whichever you like."

Tiger bought a "Sapper", a Wallace (which he could not remember having read), a Beeding, and a *Nash's Magazine*, and, thus laden, led the way back to the Bentley.

"Home, Benny," he told the waiting Bannister.

When the car had started he looked at Sonia.

"What's the programme today, old girl?"

"I thought of running down to Chipstead to see Adrienne. But I needn't go before lunch, of course. Will it be all right, old man?"

Tiger hesitated for a moment. He was in the deuce of a dilemma. If he said that he didn't care for her to take the journey into Surrey it would mean an explanation which in the absence of the truth would sound astonishingly feeble, whilst he hated her to be out of his sight for a single moment—especially after what had happened the night before.

"If I hadn't promised Adrienne——"

He pulled himself together.

"Sorry, sweetheart!" he apologized. "Of course it will be all right. As a matter of fact, I have one or two people to see myself, and this afternoon will do as well as any other time. Give Adrienne my love."

Sonia flashed a dimple at him.

"If I do, she won't be able to speak coherently the whole time I am there." The ex-model girl with whom she had struck up a friendship when they had worked together at Hélène's was such a whole-hearted admirer of Tiger that many times she had humorously declared herself to be jealous.

After lunch, Tiger did some intensive thinking.

What was he, an able-bodied person, gifted with sight and having the use of his two hands, doing sitting there? Was he to remain on his behind whilst Pickle-Face stood and took pot-shots at him? Rahusen was in London! Very well, then: he would go out and find him. And, having found him, he would break him in half and deposit one portion in the cloak-room at Waterloo Station and the other, wrapped in an offensively gaudy cloth, he would leave at Sir Harker Bellamy's flat in Queen Anne's Mansions.

What the hell . . .! And he jumped up immediately.

But he had scarcely reached the door before one of those simple truths which strike home with such devastating force made him pause. London was rather a largish place—there were a few million people living in it—and he did not possess Rahusen's exact address. It was careless of Pickle-Face not to have forwarded it, but owing to this grave discourtesy a largish-sized snag loomed up. After a while this assumed the shape of a veritable Gibraltar. It did not seem any use, he supposed, calling at the Curzon Street flat which Rahusen had occupied when he was last in London, but he had to take the chance.

No sooner was he in the hall, however, than a woman of thirty burst volcanically out of a room. Tiger murmured a few vehement blasphemies in his throat. This was Billie Dare, the musical comedy star who every now and then achieved front-page publicity by the exercise of her really remarkable amatory powers. Billie, in the course of ten years, had collected three husbands, an innumerable number of lovers, and, not without some cause, was popularly supposed to be the wickedest woman in the world.

"Tiger—*darling*!"

Before he could retreat a pair of well-rounded white arms were about his neck and pouting lips upraised to give him one of Billie's own special soul-shakers.

"I'm bored stiff," said this sensational sexualist—

not troubling to enquire the cause of his visit. "Come and be nice to me."

Even if he had not known that the words were the mere prelude to the complete outfit in seduction, even if he had been heart-free and willing for an adventure, the proposal would have left him stone cold. Shop-soiled goods had never appealed to him. Moreover, he was in quite a hurry.

"Sorry, my dear, but there's some very dreadful mistake," he replied. "I didn't come here looking for love: I came hoping to find a man whose pants I wanted to kick."

"You're not going, Tiger?"—as he turned towards the door.

"Sorry—must."

The next moment, feeling thankful for his escape, he was in the fresh air and ordering the taxi-driver to take him to the Centurions Club in Bond Street. During the short journey he speculated on the prospect of success in this quarter. He had never met a secretary of a night club in broad daylight before. From what hole in the ground would he emerge? Damned bad form, he supposed, calling on night-club secretaries before dusk, but he couldn't help that: the fellow would have to put up with it.

Arrived at the club, which in daylight looked like a football ground without its spectators, he was ushered at length into a room smelling of stale whisky and staler cigar smoke, and found himself looking into the pallid, astonished face of an individual who every few seconds shifted uneasily in his chair.

"You want to see me?" enquired the secretary, looking like a startled partridge.

"Why, yes. Sorry to butt in outside of office hours, but the matter is somewhat urgent. My name is Standish," he volunteered.

Mr. Quentin Tott—whether this cognomen was real or assumed no one ever knew—lost a little of his facial pain.

"Son of the Earl of Quorn?" he put back.

"That's right—son of the Earl of Quorn. Now, I want you to do me a favour, Mr.——"

"Tott."

"Really?"

"Tott's my name," came the reassurance.

"Oh, very well, have it your own way. I was saying, Mr. Tott, that I want you to do me a favour. I'll be very brief and tell you what it is. The other night I came to the Centurions with my wife, and in the lobby just outside the cloak-room I met a fellow who calls himself, for some obscure reason, Hamme—no, not H-a-m, H-a-m-m-e—one of the York Hammes, you know. I hadn't seen Hamme for some months, and very carelessly forgot to ask him where he now hangs out. As I want to invite him along for a bite of grub one night, and as I happened to be passing the club, I thought I would drop in and get you to give me his address."

"But I don't know that I can give you Mr. Hamme's address." Mr. Tott was very tottish.

Tiger was not totally dismayed. On the contrary, he was rather amused. His chief concern was to resist the temptation to go out and buy an over-ripe tomato and push the uncleanly vegetable into Mr. Tott's face. Yet, like the little gentleman he always tried to be, he smiled back serenely.

"Would you mind telling me if Mr. Hamme is a member here?"

"Oh," condescended Mr. Tott, "I can do that much for you."

"Thanks very much."

The production of a huge ledger-like book was followed by the rustling of its many leaves.

"Yes," declared Mr. Tott, adopting now the attitude of the highest official in the world's most important bank, "Mr. Hamme is a member of the Centurions."

"Why?"

Mr. Tott elevated his eyebrows.

"Why, Mr. Standish?"

"You heard me—*why*?"

"Well, primarily, because I take it he has paid his subscription."

"Who put him up?"

The secretary of the Centurions Club closed his membership book.

"I don't see that I'm called upon to answer so many questions," he stated with considerable dignity. "We are not in the habit, Mr. Standish, of passing for membership questionable persons—if that is what is in your mind."

What was the good of arguing with such a twit? He loathed himself for doing it, but he tried to be conciliatory with this human louse.

"Sorry, but I feel rather strongly about the worthy Hamme. However, that's nothing to do with you. But, as I hope to join the Centurions myself and bring a number of friends along, perhaps you will do me the favour of telling me where I can find the gentleman in question?"

"There's no harm in that, I feel sure," replied the ineffable Tott, twisting his mean features into the semblance of a reassuring smile. "Mr. Hamme lives, I find," he said, "at 23a Beauclerc Mansions, Baker Street."

"Thanks very much," replied Standish, and was off.

Beauclerc Mansions, eh? Ye Hamme-bone was doing himself rather well. Found a nice little bit of profitable blackguardism all on his own, perhaps. Anyway, he was going to see him.

Much has been written about Beauclerc Mansions, that huge block of luxury flats standing near Baker Street Station. A certain famous novelist, who was given to meticulous detail, lived there for a time, and, in fact, devoted one huge tome to describing a section of its inhabitants. Flats ranging from £250 a year right up to £1,250 could be obtained at Beauclerc Mansions. Certainly Hamme must have laid his hands on some money quite recently to be able to afford to run a place like this.

A manservant, correctly dressed, but with a distinctly furtive eye, answered the ring.

Yes, Mr. Hamme lived there, but he was not in. Tiger felt, from the fellow's manner, that he was lying, and, pushing his way past him, he announced his intention of waiting until his master did turn up. That rather nonplussed the other, whose eye, from being furtive, now became plainly belligerent. But Standish did not mind that one little bit. Belligerence was the appropriate atmosphere to his present surroundings. He scarcely expected to be greeted with words of welcome and a band.

"Listen, Fly-by-night," he said, catching the servant by the shoulder, "I know damned well you're lying. Your master is in—tell him I'm here. The name is Standish."

The words had a summary effect. Wriggling himself free from the very effective grip that Tiger exerted, the man opened a door and showed the visitor into a smallish room.

"If you will wait here . . ." he muttered.

"Don't forget the name," Tiger called after him. "Standish."

Confident that he had run his bird to earth, Tiger endeavoured to loll at his ease in an adequate easy chair, and awaited results. These soon came in the person of Hamme himself. The man was smiling in a disgustingly flagrant fashion, and actually held out his hand.

"My dear fellow, but this is delightful," he stated. "Why didn't you give me a ring and say you were coming? Come along in."

Tiger, reserving his verbal strength, followed the speaker into a more commodious apartment. He remarked that it was furnished with a reasonable amount of taste and that a considerable sum must have been spent on its appointments. Yes, Hamme was undoubtedly "in the money" at the moment.

"Have a drink, Standish?" invited his host.

"Thanks—I'm not drinking."

"Smoke?"

"Thanks—I'm not smoking."

"But, my dear fellow, what the hell is the matter with you? And why the matey call?"

Tiger walked across and stood looking into the man's eyes. It was not a pleasant experience, because they were remarkably unsatisfactory eyes.

"Since you've asked me," he stated, "I'll tell you why I've called. There seems to be a fairly good reason for presuming that your old friend Rahusen—you remember Pickle-Face, surely?—is back in London."

"That's news," commented Hamme.

Tiger ignored the gibe.

"I'm telling you what I believe to be correct," he went on, "and as I presume that you are still in close touch with Rahusen I want you to give him a message from me."

"But, my dear fellow," protested the other, "I can't do that."

"Why not?"

"Because I have given up meeting any criminals. I'm a reformed character—and, what is more, my health is far from being satisfactory. I have to live very quietly, to go slow."

From behind a door on the other side of the room there came a shrill and strident laugh.

"Lady friend?" queried Tiger. "Excuse me asking, but I rather wanted this conversation to be private. Anyway, it doesn't matter," he continued quickly. "The main point is that I want you to give Rahusen a message, as I said before. Pickle-Face has gone out of his way to send me a number of insulting messages. He hasn't had the pluck to put his name to them, of course, but there isn't any doubt from where they have come. In return, I want you to tell him from me that if he doesn't stop his blarneying I shall take it upon myself to visit him in person and chastise him severely."

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance, and the look on Hamme's face showed that the various shots had gone home.

"I thought I had taught Rahusen his lesson," concluded Tiger, "but it seems that he hasn't yet had enough. Very well ; if he wants a scrap he can have one—but listen, Hamme : be very careful to tell him that if he lays his dirty paws on anyone intimately connected with me—he will know what I mean—I will tear him to pieces with these hands"—showing them—"and fling the portions into the nearest sewer. Is that quite clear ?"

"I should say it was damnably clear."

"I congratulate you upon your intelligence. I'm a peaceable bird if left alone—but to remain peaceable I must be left alone. You remember Carlimero, that doctor pal of yours, I take it ? You will recall I mentioned him at the Centurions Club the other night. Well, if Rahusen wants trouble, tell him this : first Carlimero, then you, Hamme, and then Pickle-Face himself. O.K. ? If so, I'll be getting along." And he went, whistling a little tune.

CHAPTER XI

THE MAN OF SECRETS

THE Mole remained his inscrutable self.

"Certainly I'll co-operate with you, Lellant," he told the Assistant Commissioner; but, according to his custom, old fox that he was, he kept one vital fact to himself. The man who during the war had sent more spies to their death than any other counter-espionage chief played the game according to his own rules.

Sir Harold Lellant frowned at his desk. The two were seated in his private room at Scotland Yard.

"I feel personally responsible for the death of that poor devil of a policeman," he stated, "and I shall not rest until I have found his murderer. Put your cards on the table, Bellamy," he urged. "Why Tim Standish should have come to me instead of you about this affair I can't guess, but I do know that he used to work for you and . . ."

He stopped, but Sir Harker Bellamy remained a sphinx.

"There's no mystery," he said after a pause. "He told me why he came to the Yard: when a man's life is threatened—as, apparently, the Earl of Quorn's has been—then it is the plain duty of the police to see that the threat isn't carried into practice."

"Yes, yes," was the impatient rejoinder.

The Assistant Commissioner was not satisfied. He had asked the Chief of Q.I to be kind enough to step across to see him directly he reached his office that morning; but Bellamy was proving hellishly difficult.

He had promised to co-operate—but here he was, keeping back what he felt certain was vitally important information concerning the crime which was already convulsing London.

He turned in his swivel chair.

"Do you know what I think?" he said.

The only encouragement Sir Harker gave him was to pull at his cigar.

"I think that this crime was committed by the very man who threatened the life of Standish's father, and"—speaking more quickly because of the faintly supercilious expression which had come into his listener's face—"that this man is an old enemy of Standish—and that you know who it is."

Bellamy ground the stub of his half-Corona into the metal ash-tray.

"That's what you think, is it?" He was as distractingly provocative as ever.

"That's exactly what I do think, Bellamy, and let me tell you that I don't consider you are exactly playing the game by keeping this information to yourself."

"My dear simple policeman," retorted the Secret Service chief, "do you for one moment imagine that if I were as sure on this point as you believe I am I should be wasting time jaw-cracking with you? If I could put hands on the murderer with the ease you state, you wouldn't be seeing my heels for dust." With the air of being gravely offended, Bellamy made for the door.

Lellant swore as he turned back to his desk. The little grey man could not bluff him. He knew who the killer was, right enough, but wanted the credit of bringing him in to go to his own department, although, strictly speaking, it was no concern of Q.I.

For the next hour he listened to such evidence of the previous night's crime as was forthcoming—Police Sergeant Tonkin was the only witness of any value, of course, in the absence of Timothy Standish, whom he would be seeing later—and called a conference of C.I.D. chiefs. All the latter agreed with him that the murder

of a uniformed constable whilst on duty represented a challenge which had to be taken up.

"It seems to me, Sir Harold, that it's up to Mr. Standish to tell us who sent him the messages threatening his father," put in one of the five.

The Assistant Commissioner shook his head.

"You can't expect any help there," he replied. "Standish says he doesn't know himself: the letters were typewritten and unsigned—as they always are, of course, in cases of this kind."

Shortly afterwards the conference broke up, for in the absence of any definite clue nothing more could be done at the moment.

Back at his own office, Sir Harker Bellamy busied himself with routine matters until 11.30. Precisely at the half-hour his secretary announced a caller.

"Well, Carruthers?" was the greeting he gave the visitor.

"Nothing happened at the station," reported the agent of Q.I. "Standish was there wishing his father good-bye."

"You saw Torrance?"

"Yes. He's on the train."

"Good!" grunted the little grey man—and burst into a short laugh.

This merriment was so unexpected—and so unusual—that Carruthers stared.

But he did not know what was passing in The Mole's mind. Bellamy kept his secrets strictly to himself.

CHAPTER XII

THE PARAGRAPH IN THE STOP-PRESS

AFTER lunch Tiger decided that it was necessary that he should get his mind working smoothly—at the present time it was more or less of a jumble—so he shut the door and, selecting a briar out of the well-stocked rack, gave himself up to tobacco and meditation.

Before he was half-way through his first pipe he had committed various facts to paper. With the pencil still in his hand he conned what he had written :

- (1) *Rahusen is back in London.*
- (2) *He has threatened to kill (a) my father (b) Sonia (c) myself.*
- (3) *The policeman set to guard my father has been murdered. (? By Rahusen himself.)*
- (4) *My father, in spite of the threat, is still alive. (? Will attack be made on him whilst abroad.)*
- (5) *Will attack on Sonia be postponed until Rahusen has done his best to kill the Earl of Quorn ?*

Almost immediately afterwards the door opened and Sonia stepped in.

"I rather promised I'd go to tea with Sadie Leake," she stated.

"Why not ?"

Sadie, in spite of her preposterous name, was quite a good sort. She was an American girl living in London with whom they had made friends whilst staying in Paris a few months back.

"I'll come along so far, pop into the club and fetch you again. How does that sound?"

"Admirable," was his wife's comment.

Tiger arrived at Pont Street just as tea was being served. In answer to Sonia's lifted eyebrows, he told a thumper.

"Thought I'd prefer Sadie's tea to the club's," he stated. "And how's Miss America?" he added, grinning at his hostess.

Sadie gurgled—a habit she had developed since meeting the man she had admired more than any other living creature, with the one exception of her father.

"I'm fine!" she declared. "Marriage certainly seems to agree with you, Tiger."

"Sonia's my doctor," Standish replied.

After tea another man dropped in, and they played contract for an hour.

"Six o'clock!" exclaimed Sonia, looking at her watch. "We must fly. Sadie, be an angel and see if the car's outside."

"Yes—it's just arrived."

"Come along, Tiger—good-bye, Mr. Lane. Good-bye, Sadie, dear—I've enjoyed it immensely."

"Glad to have had you, darling—come again soon."

Reaching the pavement, Tiger noticed that Benny was reading a newspaper with complete absorption.

"Seeing what won the four o'clock?" he enquired good-humouredly, and snatched the paper from his chauffeur's hand. "Your job is to drive us home, my lad," he added.

It wasn't until then that he noticed the drawn expression on Bannister's face. He glanced round: Sonia was already in the car, looking through the pages of a magazine that Sadie Leake had lent her.

"What's the matter, Benny?" He felt that fresh trouble was on the way.

"Read the stop-press, guv'nor," came the hoarse whisper.

Tiger followed the direction of the pointing finger—and then bit his lip to stop the explosive oath.

For a headline screamed at him :

WIFE OF "TIGER" STANDISH
SERIOUSLY ILL

Below was the following :

We regret to learn that the wife of the Hon. T. O. Standish ("Tiger" Standish), the famous amateur centre-forward, is lying critically ill and that her life is despaired of.

Standish did some quick thinking.

Rahusen was at the back of this !

CHAPTER XIII

AN EDITOR REGRETS . . .

"WHY are we waiting, Tiger?" His wife's question brought Standish out of his reverie with a jolt. He came to himself quickly.

"Benny's fallen asleep again—don't you agree we shall have to sack him?" He spoke in his usual half-humorous way, so that Sonia should not think that anything was amiss, and accompanied the words with a nudge from his elbow into the chauffeur's ribs.

Benny was quick to take his cue.

"I'm sorry, my lady," he said, letting in his clutch.

The next moment the car drove away. A sideways glance told Bannister that his master's face was set and stern. The muscles of Standish's jaw stood out in bold relief, and there was a menacing expression in his eyes. Benny pitied the bloke who had had that paragraph inserted in the *Evening Miracle*. He wondered what Tiger would do about it.

He was not to know until the car stopped outside the Chester Street house.

"You needn't take her round to the garage, Benny," Standish said: "I shall want her myself shortly. But wait here a minute."

"Yes, guv'nor."

Back from escorting his wife up the steps and into the hall, Tiger gave a stern warning to the chauffeur.

"Now listen, Benny," he said, "and remember every word I'm telling you. I'm going straight down to the office of this paper to give the editor hell. What I want

you to do is to see that the telephone is disconnected—and make sure that no papers are brought into the house. See the servants."

Bannister, after nodding, ventured a question.

"What's the meaning of it, guv'nor?"

His master became evasive.

"Oh, just some fool's trick—but if my wife saw that paragraph she'd have an awful shock."

Benny had to be content with this, although he knew that there was far more behind the words than the ordinary person would have credited. A second later, however, he took a bolder risk.

"Why not tell me the truth, guv'nor? There's something up. There's been something up ever since that bloke shoved the letter in me 'and outside Dr. Cross's."

The man who had proved so faithful in his service was looking at him with pleading eyes. Tiger did not take long to decide. After all, he reflected, it would be impossible to keep Benny in the dark indefinitely.

"All right," he said; "I'll tell you. Rahusen is back."

It was as though the listener had become suddenly intoxicated.

"Rahusen?" replied Bannister in a kind of half-ecstasy. And then: "I knew it, guv'nor! But——"

"My wife mustn't know," sharply interrupted his master. "I'm trusting you, Benny. I know I can trust you—that's why I've said so much. You'll find a revolver in my bedroom. Until I come back . . ."

"I understand, guv'nor."

"Disconnect the telephone, see that no papers come into the house, and, if anyone calls, my wife is not at home."

Without waiting to say any more, Tiger got into the car, and the next minute was away round the corner into Grosvenor Place.

He drove swiftly, but carefully. Nothing must happen to him. If it did, Sonia would be left alone. But, although no traffic policeman could have found

any fault with his driving, his mind was very busy. It was easy for him to read the enemy's mind : Rahusen, by some means, had got that paragraph inserted. His idea was to intimidate Sonia and to put the wind up himself. That man had the mind of a rattlesnake.

Within a quarter of an hour of leaving Chester Street the car drew up before the huge building that housed the *Miracle* newspapers. A burly commissioner, officious in the discharge of his duty, looked with an enquiring air at the young man who walked so swiftly into the lobby.

"Yes, sir ?"

"I want to see the editor of the *Evening Miracle*—and I want to see him at once. Send my card up, please."

The commissioner frowned over the piece of paste-board.

"I don't quite know whether Mr. Clements is still here, sir—it's a bit late for him."

"Well, find out, please. And if there isn't anyone here on the evening staff, put me on to the editor of the *Morning Miracle*. It's urgent."

Moved by the authoritative manner of the caller, the commissioner beckoned to a messenger-boy, handed the latter Tiger's card, and said :

"Take this upstairs and see if Mr. Clements is still here. Perhaps you'd like to take a seat, sir ?" he continued to Standish, pointing to a waiting-room on the left of the lobby.

A couple of minutes later—a space of time which Tiger spent in pacing up and down the small waiting-room—the visitor was requested to step into a lift. One minute more, and he was in the presence of the editor of the *Evening Miracle*. No time was lost in preliminaries.

"I have called," said Tiger, "to ascertain how you came to publish this paragraph"—pointing to the stop-press of the paper he carried.

The editor motioned to a chair.

"Won't you sit down, Mr. Standish ?"

"I'm too busy to sit down. Please answer my question."

The editor adjusted his glasses and scanned the news item.

"The information came to us from a most reliable quarter."

Tiger fumed.

"Well, let me tell you that your 'reliable quarter' is damnably misinformed. There is not a word of truth in this paragraph—my wife is perfectly well, and has not had a day's illness for months. What are you going to do about it?"

The editor's reply took the shape of pressing a bell on his desk.

"The writer of this paragraph, Mr. Mornington Cass, who contributes gossip paragraphs to our 'Talk of the Town' column, is, I believe, in the building. I will request him to give us an explanation. Now sit down, Mr. Standish; rest assured that I will do everything possible to rectify the error."

The speaker's manner left no room for criticism and Tiger took the chair indicated. A messenger-boy entered.

"Tell Mr. Cass I want to see him immediately."

An over-dressed young man with an offensively languid air sauntered into the room.

"You want me, Clements?"

"I do. This is the Hon. Timothy Standish. He has come to complain that the paragraph you wrote about his wife being ill is a canard. Please tell us how you got your information."

The languid one stared at Standish in perplexity.

"It was told me over the telephone—or, rather, it was told my servant—by your cousin, Lady Cecile Lelly."

This time it was Tiger's turn to stare. He knew Cecile to be an arrant busybody, but it was inconceivable that even such a fluffy-headed fool as she could concoct such a yarn.

"Do you mind if I use your telephone?" he asked the editor.

"Not at all; I'll get you the number." He took off the receiver. "Get me Lady Cecile Lelly, please."

There was silence in the room until the 'phone bell rang.

"Here you are," announced the editor.

"Who is that?" drawled a voice.

"This is Tim Standish. Is that you, Cecile?"

"Hullo, Tim! What's all the bother? And, I say, I'm awfully sorry about Sonia——"

"That's what I want to talk to you about. I'm telephoning from the office of the *Evening Miracle*. Their gossip-writer, a Mr. Mornington Cass, tells me that it was you who gave him the information."

"I gave him the information?" replied an incredulous voice. "I've never spoken to the man in my life!"

"Well, speak to him now. Hold on just a minute."

After the resultant talk, Cass looked at his editor. There could be no question that he was utterly bewildered.

"Well, it's beyond me completely," he said. "All I know is that when I got back to the flat this afternoon there was a written message from my man to the effect that Lady Cecile Lelly had rung me up and had left a message. That message was that your wife"—turning now to Standish—"was desperately ill, and that the two specialists called in had stated that she had not long to live. I telephoned the office immediately——"

"I shall solve the mystery sooner or later," broke in Standish. "In the meantime, I should have imagined that an item of news like this required verification before it was printed."

The editor nodded.

"Everything on an evening paper, Mr. Standish, is done in a rush. The fact that the news was telephoned to our representative by your own cousin seemed good enough for me. But, as it is happily incorrect, I trust you will accept my sincere apologies and allow me to rectify the mistake in the best way possible."

"How can it be rectified?"

"I will telephone the Press Association, who will circulate a statement to the effect that the rumour concerning your wife's health is unfounded. My directors will have something to say about it, but that is my funeral. May I ask if you can offer any suggestion concerning the person who played this trick?"

"I'm afraid I can't, but I'm going to find out. In the meanwhile, I thank you for your courtesy."

They shook hands, and within a minute Tiger was speeding back to Chester Street.

As he raced upstairs to his dressing-room he heard his wife's voice.

"Darling, something's gone wrong with the telephone."

"Really? I must get on to them in the morning."

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEALER IN BEAUTIFUL THINGS

"Oh, switch off, old man." Sonia's naturally sweet temper was sorely tried. "Of all the utter rubbish . . ."

Tiger, busy with his own thoughts, switched off with a loud click.

They had gone to his den again after dinner. Nothing delighted Sonia more than to curl herself up in one of her husband's huge leather chairs so that she was able to look up every so often from her book to see Tiger placidly smoking his pipe. But that particular evening she had not been allowed to do much reading. Tiger seemed in an especially affectionate mood. For a full half an hour after they had come to the "den" they had shared the same chair, and his strong arms had never once released her.

"Thinking—what?" she asked.

He was ready with an answer.

"That if anything should happen to you, my sweet, I should surely die," he said.

It was only when nine o'clock came—the time for the second news bulletin to be broadcast—that Tiger freed his willing prisoner.

There was a knock on the door.

"Come," called Tiger. "Yes, Pringle?" as the butler entered.

"A gentleman has called to see you, sir."

Sonia noticed her husband's body stiffen as though preparing to meet an attack. She wondered why.

"Who is it, Pringle?" she asked, her mothering instincts uppermost.

"A Mr. Hans de Boo, madam."

"A Mr. de what?"

The butler looked again at the card he held in his hand.

"A Mr. Hans de Boo, madam," he repeated.

Sonia gurgled.

"Why, it's almost as comic as that stuff we've just been listening to, old man," she remarked to her husband. "Do you know any Hans de Boo, Tiger?"

"Not a solitary one. Don't you worry, my dear; I'll soon shoo him off."

Without waiting for any reply he walked to the door, which he closed after him. He did not like to think of himself as an alarmist, but it was only natural that, after the events of the past few days, he should view this stranger with the peculiar name suspiciously.

"Where is Mr. de Boo?" he enquired.

"I showed him into the drawing-room, sir."

For a moment Tiger stood hesitating, then he shrugged his shoulders. He could take care of himself in his own house, he hoped.

But there was one thing to be done.

"In future, Pringle," he told the butler, "you are to allow no one to come into the house without my strict instructions. No one, you understand?"

"Very good, sir."

Dismissing the man with a nod, Tiger opened the drawing-room door and stepped inside.

A pleasant-faced individual, with fattish cheeks and a disarming air of good-fellowship, rose upon his entrance. This complete stranger made his first announcement in an apologetic tone.

"I'm most frightfully sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Standish, but I have called at the request of my friend Mr. Samuel Leake."

"Oh yes?" returned Tiger in a non-committal tone. Samuel Leake was Sadie's father, who supported the popular dictum of good Americans going to Paris to die by refusing ever to leave the French capital. He was not

committing himself yet. This apparently affable person with the round apple-cheeks was a perfect stranger, and he was not in the mood to burst into glad song at the sight of him. If Pringle had not been such a fool the man would not have gained entry.

"Well, sit down, anyway, Mr.——"

"De Boo. Hans de Boo. I'm Dutch," the caller went on to explain.

"I see."

By this time both were seated—Tiger having his back to the door. He couldn't imagine that the still-smiling visitor contemplated any funny stuff, but he wasn't taking any chances.

Mr. de Boo looked round the room.

"It is as my friend Leake said," he remarked, nodding his head.

Tiger's curiosity increased.

"What did Mr. Leake say?" he enquired.

"He told me that you had a very beautiful home."

"Very nice of him."

"And that both you and your wife possessed enviable taste—especially your wife."

A slight added excitement had crept into the speaker's voice. Tiger considered. Was this a hint?

"I'm afraid my wife isn't available just now, Mr. de Boo. You must excuse her."

"Oh, certainly. And whilst I'm making one apology, I might as well make two—I should have given you notice that I intended to call. But Mr. Leake, when I met him in Paris, said that you were not at all the conventional type. That must be my excuse—at least, one of my excuses."

"And the other?"

"Well," smiled the visitor, "I am afraid that I must throw myself rather on your mercy. You see, I am—what do you call it in England?—a dealer in beautiful things: antique furniture, *objets d'art*, pictures, tapestries, and also jewels."

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I don't know

that I'm in the buying mood just now. Income tax and all that, you know."

The caller did his best to cover any disappointment he was feeling.

"I quite understand. Most of my English clients—and I have a good many—have unfortunately told me the same thing. Yet"—he hesitated—"perhaps a jewel for your wife, a ring—I have an exceptionally fine diamond at my disposal."

Tiger looked at the speaker keenly. Somehow he couldn't cotton to this fellow ; there was something about him—he could not tell quite what it was—which put him off.

"No—not even a diamond. Sorry," he added, as though wishing to conclude the interview.

"Then I must renew my apologies and not waste any more of your time."

Mr. de Boo rose, bowed, and half turned towards the door. As he did so, his eye caught something which evidently interested him.

"Ah !" he stated. "A beautiful piece !"—pointing to a French commode with ormolu mounts. "Louis the Fifteenth, of course," he continued. "It goes marvellously with your very charming tapestries."

Standish softened. After all, he had behaved rather cavalierly.

"Yes," he returned ; "I bought it a few months back in Wigmore Street. The dealer assured me it was genuine."

"Genuine ? Oh, genuine without a doubt," was the swift retort. "Allow me." Mr. de Boo walked towards the piece, and, taking a magnifying glass out of his pocket, screwed it into his right eye. "Beautiful !" he stated.

Sonia placed the book she had been trying to read on the small table, started to smoke a fresh cigarette and then flung it into the fire. What was Tiger doing ? And who was this man who had called without any warning ?

She had tried hard all that evening to put aside the fresh fears that had besieged her. Tiger, after a return to his usual manner, had behaved somewhat strangely again. The passionate way in which he had fondled her—was there some hidden meaning behind it? And the disconnected telephone. Bannister, when she had spoken to him, had appeared confused. The servants, too, at dinner . . . their behaviour had been rather strange, unless her imagination was at fault.

She rang the bell.

"Where is Mr. Standish?" she asked the butler.

Pringle appeared ill-at-ease.

"He's still with Mr. Hans de Boo, madam."

"Do you know what Mr. de Boo called about?"

"I'm afraid not, madam."

"Very well, Pringle."

She made up her mind: she was going to see this caller for herself. Not that Tiger couldn't take very good care of himself—it wasn't that—but she wanted some kind of reassurance. Her nerves were getting the better of her again; that wouldn't do.

Fired by this resolution, she left the den and started to walk down the corridor in the direction of the drawing-room. Outside the door she paused. Then, fretted by a fresh anxiety, she gently opened the door. The action was performed so quietly that neither of the two men appeared to have heard. On the opposite side of the room Tiger and a stranger were looking at a piece of furniture. She heard the other man make an exclamation—something that sounded like "Beautiful"—and after that Tiger led the way towards the fireplace.

It was when Tiger had turned his back to the visitor that she saw the latter's face change. Before, it had appeared the essence of good nature, but now the mask slipped and she was able to watch the real man.

Whoever this caller was, he hated her husband—so much was proved by the blaze in his eyes and the contortions of his features.

"*Tiger!*" she suddenly called.

The word was out before she quite realized what she had done. Her only thought was that this man was an enemy and that she had to give her husband a warning. Both turned swiftly—in the case of de Boo the face into which she now looked was wiped so clean of its former expression that she told herself she might have been dreaming.

"Hullo, darling !" smiled Standish. "I'm sorry I've been so long. Let me introduce you. Mr. Hans de Boo—my wife."

The visitor bowed.

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance, Mrs. Standish. I was hoping to have had the pleasure, but your husband said that you were busy."

"So I was," she returned, playing up, "but I'm quite free now. That's why I came along."

"Perhaps I can now induce your husband to change his mind." De Boo's manner was insinuating.

Sonia's answer was sharp.

"Change his mind—about what?" She looked at Tiger. The latter gave her a ready explanation.

"Mr. de Boo is, amongst other things, a dealer in precious stones, my dear. He was sent here by Sadie Leake's father. He has just asked me if I would like to buy a diamond—for you."

Sonia's chief wish was to get this man out of the house.

"Not for me, Tiger—I wouldn't let you spend the money."

"But this is a specially fine stone, Mrs. Standish."

"All the same, I don't want it. Don't think me rude, but——"

Tiger spoke his piece.

"I can't afford it just now, can I, darling?"

"No."

Why wouldn't the man go? Why was he hanging about here? She wanted to get Tiger alone—to tell him about the fear that was pressing her so hard.

"I am sorry ; but my time has not been wasted. I

have had the pleasure of seeing this very beautiful room and"—the eyes which had been roaming now concentrated on her—"the still greater joy of having met you, Mrs. Standish."

Sonia shrank back. What was it about this man—apart altogether from the look of hatred she had seen him flash at her husband—which made him so loathsome? She felt as though she were in the presence of a reptile—a venomous snake, hiding in the grass, only waiting the opportunity to strike. At the risk of being considered unpardonably rude she had to turn away from him.

"Good night, Mr. Standish."

"Good night, Mr. de Boo."

"Good night, Mrs. Standish."

She forced herself round.

"Good night, Mr. de Boo."

He was holding out a hand, but she could not take it. Waiting in an embrasure of the hall, she heard Tiger wishing his visitor good-bye. Directly the door was closed she raced forward.

"Darling!"

Standish looked at her anxiously.

"What is it, my sweet?"

Then, like a lightning-flash, came something which she felt was revelation.

"That man!"

"What about him?"

"He's an enemy."

"An enemy?"

"Yes. I believe he's been sent here by Rahusen—perhaps . . ."

But her husband was no longer listening. He had turned swiftly round, picked up hat and coat, and the next thing she knew was that she was alone.

"Sent by Rahusen. . . ."

The words, although Sonia had not raised her voice above a whisper, had been like thunder in his ears. What

had given his wife such insight he could not tell, but he was willing to back her intuition—back it to the limit. Trust a woman to see clean through to brain and heart when her dearest interests were at stake!

As, acting on that irresistible impulse, he snatched up coat and hat, Tiger asked himself why he had been fooled. The mention of Samuel Leake had lulled his first suspicions, of course, but all the same there had been something about de Boo which he could not exactly describe—some mysterious and intangible quality both of body and mind which had tempted him to lay hands on the bloke and fling him out of the window. And this in spite of all the other's fine words and elaborate manners. That was why he had been so offhand with the man at the beginning.

"Sent by Rahusen. . . ."

That meant that if he could keep track of the fellow he might lead him to the Man with the Dead Face.

By this time Tiger was out of the house. A car was speeding away to the left in the direction of Wilton Crescent. While he fumed a taxi passed at a pace that denoted the driver was looking for a fare.

"Taxi!" He rushed into the roadway, pulled open the door of the cab and pointed to the car whose rear-light was just disappearing round the corner. "Follow that car, driver, and I'll give you a fiver above your fare."

"Righto, guv'nor!"

He had not been able to get a full view of the speaker's face, but the reply, prompt, unquestioning, imperturbable, so thoroughly characteristic altogether of the London taximan, was sufficiently reassuring. The engine was old, but it responded nobly to its driver's demands. By the time the park was reached, only a dozen yards or so separated the two vehicles. There was a speaking-tube, and Tiger picked it up.

"Don't lose her, driver"

"Trust me, guv'nor!" came the hoarse reply.

The car turned into Cumberland Place after leaving the Marble Arch; then, with a sharp swerve to the right,

plunged into the network of main streets of which Baker Street formed the principal artery, before finally slowing down and entering what looked to Tiger like a cul-de-sac devoted mainly to warehouses. The taxi stopped and the driver opened the door.

"What do I do now, guv'nor?"

"Stay here." Tiger's decision was already made.

"Don't look too 'ealthy a spot to me."

"Never mind—wait here. I may want you."

"O.K., guv'nor. I trusts yer."

Tiger by this time was on the pavement. The car had stopped twenty yards or so ahead on the right. A man got out; it was de Boo. At the sight Standish quickened his pace. Wherever de Boo went he intended to go. If Rahusen had a hide-away somewhere behind the ugly exterior of those warehouses he was going to penetrate to it.

Rahusen!

To get to grips with the swine! To feel his hands on the throat of the man who looked like a living corpse but who was a raging devil. . . .

De Boo, he could see now, was standing outside a door that seemed to form part of the entrance to one of the warehouses. As he approached, the man did not turn his head. Strange, but perhaps he was too occupied with his thoughts. Those who worked for Rahusen generally had plenty to think about.

A second later Tiger learned the reason. If his eyes had once left de Boo he would have been lost. As it was, when he saw the other turn, flash a hand to his pocket and pull out a revolver, he instinctively started to fling himself flat on the pavement.

As he did so a number of men poured out from the warehouse and hurled themselves on him.

CHAPTER XV

A SPOT OF JIU-JITSU

It was his sixth sense of intuition that saved Tiger. Although he would have been the last to admit that he was blessed with an over-allowance of grey matter, his brain on occasions worked with remarkable rapidity. That was why, when he felt a number of enemies pouncing on him from behind, their weight bearing him irresistibly to the ground, he wriggled himself sideways. The result of this manœuvre was that a couple of his foes crashed against themselves, leaving two others for him to deal with.

It was then that the few simple tricks which Dalamore, the jiu-jitsu expert, had shown him came in useful. While still underneath, he got a leverage on an arm of each of his immediate adversaries, and piercing screams of pain told how efficacious his new-found methods were. He rose quickly to his feet to avoid, with a swift swerve, the knife-thrust made at him by Enemy No. 3, who had now got to his feet, and, moving forward a pace, applied the quietus to this gentleman with an upper-cut that first lifted him off his feet and then sent him back to the pavement with a crash that might have awakened the Seven Sleepers. No. 4, evidently thinking better of the matter, rushed into the motor-car that was still waiting, let in his clutch, turned swiftly, and was away into the night.

Tiger surveyed the battlefield. Although his left knee was troubling him slightly, he felt rather pleased with himself. Good old Dalamore !

By this time company had arrived.

"My Gawd!" exclaimed a Cockney voice—and there, admiration in his eyes, was the driver of the taxi. By his side stood a perplexed-looking police constable. From where he had materialized Standish did not know; it was sufficient for the moment that he was there.

"What's all this?" drawled the officer.

It was enough for two of the vanquished three. The men who had knocked their heads together a minute before, thus rendering them temporarily *hors de combat*, followed the example of their comrades. They were fleet of foot, and the constable, a comfortable tub of a man, forty-five to fifty years of age, allowed them to go with a shake of his head. He was no runner himself. . . .

Tiger reflected. What should he tell the policeman? He decided on at least part of the truth.

"I was walking down here, officer, when a number of men attacked me. They seemed to come out of this door." He pointed to the entrance to the warehouse.

"We'll soon see about that, sir," announced the policeman.

Knocking on the side door with his truncheon, he waited until footsteps could be heard on the other side. In the meantime Tiger was doing a little speculating. What had happened to Mr. Hans de Boo? Had he entered that warehouse, or was he hiding in the car whilst the conflict raged? It would be interesting to know.

A few moments later a shaggy head appeared after the door was opened. This man had night-watchman written all over him.

He blinked at the trio, and then, his eyes remaining fixed on the constable, he said:

"Good evening, orficer!"

"Good evening to you, Biggs. There's been a bit of trouble."

"A bit of trouble?"

"Yes. This gentleman"—pointing to Standish—"says that he was set on by a number of men who came out of your warehouse."

The watchman shook his head.

"If they was 'ere I didn't see 'em—and I don't see 'ow they could be 'ere. I came on duty at nine o'clock, an' everything's been all right since."

The constable looked at Tiger. The latter had already made up his mind.

"I may have been mistaken, of course—perhaps I'd better not say anything more about it. In any case, no harm has been done. Sorry to have troubled you, Mr. Biggs."

The watchman ducked his head.

"Very nice of you to say so, sir. No trouble at all."

"There's a good deal of this attempted highway robbery going on," stated the portly constable.

Tiger seized on the suggestion.

"They must have been after my pocket-book. That was it—you've hit it in one, officer."

Whilst the taxi-driver grinned behind the cigarette he had lit, the policeman rubbed the lower of his two chins.

"But, in a way of speaking, sir, you were to blame for coming down here at all."

Standish applied the closure.

"Yes, I suppose I was," he returned. "But I wanted to look up a friend. Good night, officer."

Leaving the startled-looking constable swaying on his substantial feet, Tiger touched the taxi-driver on the arm, and the two left the cul-de-sac.

"Where now, sir?" asked the driver as he opened the door.

"Well, I think I've had sufficient excitement for one night—Chester Street, Grosvenor Place."

Whilst he was being driven home Tiger did a simple sum in arithmetic. In the debit column there was the fact that he had been unsuccessful in getting hold of

Hans de Boo, but on the credit side he had the knowledge that this man was a fake, and that there was some mysterious connection between him and the entrance to that warehouse in Coulter's Passage, just off Baker Street. Some night soon he was going to return to Coulter's Passage and make a few investigations—he thought this energy might receive a proper reward. Of course, one never knew, but it was worth trying.

Anxiety for Sonia made him race up the stairs when he reached home. Directly he showed himself in the doorway his wife's arms were round his neck.

"Oh, Tiger!" she sobbed. "Thank God you're safe! Why did you rush away like that?"

"Had to, my dear—simply obliged to. I had to verify your suspicions."

"What happened?" she asked breathlessly.

It was no good; he could not keep up this deception any longer; it wasn't fair to her. Eliminating only the fact that Rahusen had sent him those death messages, he gave a straightforward account of his adventures that night. At the end Sonia was wide-eyed and trembling.

"It must mean what I said," she told him. "It must mean that Rahusen is back—and that he intends to——"

Tiger put his arms about her.

"Who won the last round?" he enquired.

"You did, old man, and you'll win this one, and the next, and the next, if there are any. But, oh, I can't stand the anxiety; I can't bear to think of you in danger."

"Danger!" he scoffed, because he had to try to put her mind at rest. "There's no danger. Dalamore has taught me jiu-jitsu! I'm going to him tomorrow, by the way, for another lesson. Of course, if it hadn't been for jiu-jitsu I might have been knocked about a bit tonight, but look—not a scratch! Now, don't you worry, sweetheart; my time hasn't come yet, and when it does, it won't be Rahusen who will apply the

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finish. Let's go to bed and have a good read of that thriller *The Corpse in the Passage*."

"Oh, Tiger, darling, don't!"

But as they went up the stairs Sonia joined in her husband's ringing laugh.

CHAPTER XVI

THE MADMAN OF CARLTON HOUSE TERRACE

SIR HARKER BELLAMY listened in moody silence until Lord Belshaven had come to an end. The Foreign Secretary concluded with a significant remark.

"It's up to you, Bellamy, to find this assassin, and I expect to hear that you have got hold of him quickly. I can imagine what you are thinking ; but Scotland Yard, let me add, is not concerned with this. It is our pigeon—yours. This detestable crime has a political slant, and it is the job of the British Intelligence not merely to ensure that nothing else of the kind occurs but that the criminal is discovered without delay. A tall order, you may say—but there it is."

Lord Charles Belshaven, His Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, was reputed to be the most coldly correct individual throughout His Majesty's realm ; and that wasn't so much of an exaggeration as might appear on the surface. Educated at Eton and Balliol, he was the most typical product of the latter seat of frigid behaviour that Oxford had yet given to the world. A man who never spared himself, working his brain and body to the limit of their capacity, he never expected anyone else to flag. Although he hated him personally, Sir Harker Bellamy respected his official self. The Mole loved a worker.

"Very well, Belshaven," he said, and went his way.

Back in his office, a stone's throw from the Cenotaph in Whitehall, he applied himself to this new problem. The facts were as follows: the previous night Lord

Belshaven, accompanied by his principal private secretary, had gone to a reception at the American Embassy. Nothing untoward had occurred until the two men were returning home. Belshaven was sufficiently old-fashioned to live in Carlton House Terrace, that monument to a tremendous past, and it was when the car was turning the corner that a most unusual thing occurred. A man—quite evidently mad—came rushing after the car, shouting at the top of his voice. This is what he said :

"Justice for England ! I demand justice for England !"

If Charles Belshaven could have been said to possess a single human emotion, it was his love for his country. It was his passionate desire to set Britain above every other nation in the world that had caused him to devote the whole of his life to public service. Ambition had played a part, it is true, but the dominant urge that had swept him on was a burning sense of patriotism.

Aroused at the cry, he would have opened the window and thrust out his face had not the pain in his back (he was a chronic invalid) attacked him with sudden and almost paralysing force. The restraining hand of his secretary's arm would have had no effect in ordinary circumstances, but now, laid low by his old enemy, he remained in the corner of the car.

It was Maltravers, the Foreign Secretary's confidential right-hand man, who looked out of the window. Like his chief, he was intrigued by that puzzling chant.

The madman—for such he judged him to be—drew alongside with a gasp ; he had been running so hard after the car that he was out of breath. Maltravers noticed that the other was dressed in some fantastic costume. He might have come straight from a Chelsea Arts Ball at the Albert Hall. The mask on his face might have been worn by one of Balzac's Touraine friars, so rubicund and veined was that imitation of a wine-inflamed countenance.

One does not look for medieval friars in Carlton House Terrace—not even at 2 a.m.—and Maltravers,

almost as frigid a soul as his master, stared at the masquerader in amazement.

"Justice for England!" shouted the other. *"I demand justice for England!"*

"Stop that noise, you fool!" cried the secretary.

With that the masquerader leaped forward. There was a knife in his hand. The driver of the Rolls, who knew that it was as much as his job was worth to look anywhere but straight in front of him, did not see what occurred—but Maltravers fell backward with a knife-thrust in his throat from which the blood came gushing. . . .

Startled out of his habitual phlegm, Lord Belshaven uttered a shrieking cry—but by the time the chauffeur had come to the door, the masquerader had vanished. Only the rapid beat of a motor engine told of his going.

That was the sensational story which the Foreign Secretary had detailed to the Intelligence Chief only a few minutes before.

The Mole chewed on the end of his cigar. There were many remarkable facts about this tragedy, and it was his duty to link them together and endeavour to obtain from the result a coherent picture. Undoubtedly the intention of the assassin had been to kill the Foreign Secretary. Why? Well, there were a multitude of reasons. Belshaven had committed himself very definitely to a policy in mid-Europe which did not meet with the approval of at least two powerful nations. The ordinary person would have said that such an idea as now came into the head of the Intelligence Chief was so much preposterous nonsense, but Sir Harker Bellamy, out of his vast experience, knew otherwise. What was a man's life compared with the future destiny of a great country? And those who ruled one nation in particular had proved themselves willing to sacrifice a hundred thousand souls in order to gain even some of their ends.

Supposing Belshaven had been killed—as would undoubtedly have been the case if his back had not been troubling him that night? The Mole, shrewd

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and calculating, told himself that it would not have been a great loss from a national point of view. The real tragedy was that Ronald Maltravers had been sacrificed ; for Maltravers, as everyone behind the scenes knew, was the brain at the back of Belshaven. The Foreign Secretary's façade was very impressive, but he got not only his ideas but the ability with which to work them out from his right-hand man.

Yes, Maltravers' death represented a real loss to the country.

From the man himself, Bellamy went on to consider the nature of his death. That knife-thrust—who else had been killed by a dagger in the neck quite recently ? Of course ! That policeman fellow who had been stationed outside the house of the Earl of Quorn !

It did not take him long to flash his thoughts from the latter to Tiger Standish. His former agent must be in this thing up to his neck. Why the hell didn't he talk ? Why had he taken up that damned silly attitude ? Because he wanted to keep the stage clear for another scrap between Rahusen and himself ? Was that it ? But that was so much bunk—how could he hope to cope with the machinations of a crook like Rahusen when the latter must have an army of people working for him ? It had been different six months before : then Tiger had had the whole of Q.1 to call upon if he needed help. Now he was alone—the fool !

Bellamy softened for a moment. Tiger Standish had done invaluable work for him in the past, and he was missing his services every day ; but his pride would not allow him to make any fresh overtures. He had held out the olive branch, and it had been rejected. Very well, that must end it. But this knowledge merely served to increase his anger against Standish. This present job, for instance, was just such a commission as in former days Standish would have accepted with alacrity and a burst of song. But now he would have to put Gerrish and Manton on to it—with the probability that they would come back beaten. These were dark days—far darker in

some respects than those of the war years—and although he revelled in them, for he loved his job, they brought their terrific responsibilities. The Prime Minister would be watching him over this Belshaven affair and expecting results. The Old Man, for all his religious spoutings, could get into a hell of a sweat at times. Like most politicians who had come into power through a Sunday-school and Congregational chapel medium, he had a very rough side to his tongue. Oh, well, he'd better get on with it. . . . Bellamy rang his bell.

CHAPTER XVII

THE CHALLENGE

THE *Daily Sentinel* prided itself upon being the most enterprising newspaper in Fleet Street. Substantial success had attended its efforts to be bright, breezy, and brotherly. These three "B's" constituted the editorial policy of its millionaire proprietor. Lord Martindale's frequent exordium to his staff was: "Give 'em what they want, and they'll buy it." The public, true to form, had responded.

On this particular morning the news-editor of the *Sentinel*, Cecil Washborough, departed from his usual practice and pushed aside the typewritten sheet of "suggestions" for news stories which his secretary placed on his desk immediately after arrival.

"There's only one story today worth a damn," he said. "Send Clergyman to me."

The famous Fleet Street reporter, who, on account of his extraordinary cognomen, was universally known as "the Bishop", left the big editorial room in answer to the summons, and stood, a minute later, smiling down at his chief.

"Yes, Wash?" he enquired.

The news-editor, who liked to think himself a cynic, glanced up at the highest-paid member of his staff.

"Find out who pushed that dagger into Maltravers' neck last night," he said. "That's the second crime of the kind that's occurred within a week. Looks to me as though a new homicidal maniac is abroad. Go and find him."

Without wasting another word, Washborough turned to other matters. He knew that if the maniac could be found, his crime expert would be the bright boy to lay his hands on the fellow's shoulder. He would back the Bishop against all the C.I.D. men in the Yard.

Clergyman, for his part, was used to such scant instructions. A zealot at his job, he wasted no time in argument, but went straight to the newspaper's library. There he looked over a few newspaper cuttings, and then sallied forth. He had made up his mind from which point to start his investigation.

A twenty minutes' taxi ride brought him to Chester Street; another sixty seconds, and a man whom every football fan in London knew by sight was enquiring his business. The Bishop, who talked like a gentleman and dressed like one—Fleet Street now knows the value of a good address—came at once to the point.

"I'm the crime reporter of the *Daily Sentinel*, Mr. Standish," he started, "and this morning I've been given a man-sized job. I've been sent out to find the homicidal maniac who's killing people by pushing daggers into their necks."

"Why come to me?" asked his host, with narrowed eyes.

"That's a simple one to answer, Mr. Standish: the first murder of this kind took place a few nights back. It was a policeman who, according to my information, was standing outside your father's house in Lowndes Square."

Tiger laughed.

"You must have a vivid imagination, my friend, if you connect the murder of a constable with that of the principal private secretary of an important politician. Again, why come to me?"

"I'll tell you," was the frank answer. "There was far more at the back of the murder of that constable than has yet come out. I wonder if you would be good enough to let me in on the secret?"

"There's no secret—at least, not one that I can tell you."

The reporter showed no signs of being discouraged. He had been too long at the game for that. Instead, he tried another tack.

"I take it you would be pleased to find the murderer?"

The answer was startling.

"I'm going to find him—and when I do I'll wring his neck."

"Well, when you do I'll be glad if you'll let me know. Thanks very much for letting me have this short chat. Good morning, Mr. Standish."

Little realizing what he had done, Tiger was startled the next morning to come across the following sensation splashed on the *Sentinel's* front page :

TIGER STANDISH'S CHALLENGE

DETERMINATION TO FIND NEW HOMICIDAL MANIAC

The new homicidal maniac, who specializes in killing his victims by thrusting a knife into their necks, is up against a stern avenger. Yesterday morning, in conversation with a Daily Sentinel representative, the Hon. Timothy Standish, better known to football followers as "Tiger" Standish, issued through this newspaper the following challenge to the latest killer to paralyse London :

"I will find you, and when I have found you I will break your neck."

The dramatic words startled the Sentinel representative, as they will startle everyone who reads them. But, uttered by a man whose doings in a certain branch of the British Secret Service have become almost legendary, they represent no idle boast. Mr. Standish's determination to find this mysterious assassin is actuated by the fact that when a believed madman threatened the life of his father recently, a police constable, for precaution's sake, was placed on duty outside the Earl of Quorn's house in Lowndes Square. The second night he was on duty the unfortunate constable was found murdered—with a dagger buried to the hilt in his neck,

Tiger fumed with fury when he read this highly decorated account of the short interview he had allowed the *Sentinel* man the day before. Although substantially true, he loathed the idea of posing as a public hero in this flamboyant manner. Fortunately he had caught sight of the paper first ; it must be kept from Sonia. Scarcely had he placed the paper on one side when Pringle, the butler, told him that he was wanted on the telephone.

He went into his den, unhooked the receiver and placed it to his ear.

Immediately a sound of maniacal laughter came to him over the wire. Then a voice.

"I accept your challenge, Standish," it said.

CHAPTER XVIII

ENTER RICHARD THE LION

TIGER cursed loudly and volubly. He had not had time yet to recover from his annoyance at the flamboyant interview in the *Daily Sentinel*, and the mocking laugh which had followed the words, "I accept your challenge, Standish," had made the pot boil over.

"Who the devil . . . ?" But the line had gone dead ; there was no answer.

He replaced his own receiver with a fresh oath. What was the good of enquiring of the operator whence the call had come ? He knew very well what would be the answer—that the speaker had been talking from a telephone-kiosk and not from any address that might give a tangible clue.

Lighting the pipe he had just filled, he flung himself into a chair. This was getting intolerable. The main trouble was that he seemed absolutely powerless to put a stop to it.

After fidgeting in his chair for several minutes, he decided on action. It was no use sitting there stewing : he would go for a walk in the park ; his head wanted clearing.

But first of all he had to know where Sonia was. Pringle, the butler, supplied this information.

"Mrs. Standish has gone shopping, sir. She left a message to that effect."

"Oh, very well. Tell her I shall be back for lunch."

"Very good, sir."

He was glad his wife was out of the house. Sonia would have known instantly that something fresh had upset him, and he would have had the very dickens of a job to reassure her. Shopping? But that was all right; it would give her something to ease her own mind. He remembered now she had said something over the breakfast-table about "not having a hat to wear".

The butler watched his master stride purposefully down the street, before being startled out of his usual phlegm by a Cockney enquiry.

"Where's the guv'nor going?" It was Benny Bannister who put the question.

"'Ow do I know?" retorted Pringle, dropping an "h" through being so startled. Between him and Benny there was a kind of armed neutrality existing. Neither liked the other, but for the peace of the household they did their best to conceal the fact—at least in front of other people. Pringle considered it very undignified of a man occupying his employer's position in society to make such a confidant of his chauffeur; whilst Benny, devoted democrat that he was, had little patience with what he considered the posturing of this "male housemaid".

"All right, all right," he now said; "I merely arsked. Hullo, you little scoundrel!" he went on to exclaim in an entirely different tone, for striding majestically past the legs of Pringle came Richard the Lion, taking his first savour of the morning air.

Responding to the advances of the chauffeur, the half-Persian first rubbed his head against Benny's leggings and then allowed Bannister to pick him up. From this position he viewed Pringle with the perfect detachment peculiar to cats.

A second later he wrinkled his nose.

"Quite right, Dick—he doesn't smell too nice, does he?" Considering for once that he had gained the victory, Benny turned and, with the animal still in his arms, walked away to the garage.

Although Richard the Lion was perfectly familiar with these surroundings, and, indeed, on occasion was willing to spend a couple of hours with the man he considered next in order of merit after his master and mistress, the half-Persian this morning betrayed signs of uneasiness.

"What's the matter with you?" demanded Benny.

If Dick could have spoken he would have said that he was missing his beloved master very badly. It was his custom to repair to the den after breakfast in the kitchen and spend the next half an hour on Tiger's knee; but this morning, when he had gone in for his usual brief siesta, the room was empty. Like most cats, Richard the Lion hated to have his routine disturbed; moreover, with the extraordinary intuition that the tribe possesses, he had sensed that there was something more than usually wrong this particular a.m. He wished he knew what was the exact trouble, but the house for some days past now had been disturbed. The perfect order to which he had become accustomed had received a severe jolt. Ah, well, he supposed things would right themselves in time—but he hoped the process would not be too long delayed.

Crouched at the door of the garage, which commanded a clear view in various directions, he waited with more or less impatience for his master to show up. But time went on and Tiger did not appear. Perhaps—who shall say a cat hasn't a brain?—he had returned to the house by the side door. Directly this thought entered his mind, Richard the Lion rose, stretched himself, gave a miaow in parting to the staring Bannister, and, with the dignity that constituted one of his principal charms, strolled back into the house.

"Hullo!" he said to himself as he reached the hall. "What's this?"

The object to which he was referring was unfamiliar and therefore to be investigated. It was square in shape and looked like one of those things in which he had seen his mistress (how soft her cheek was when she pressed

it against his fur !) put those funny things which she wore when she went out. A hat-box, no less.

But because it was strange, this thing had to be smelt. Every strange object that came into the house he liked to smell. So, with a bound, he jumped on to the hall table and began to sniff. Quite quickly his previous interest perceptibly quickened. This new strange thing was very funny—there was a noise going on inside ! A noise that he didn't like. It might have been made by "Black", his enemy from next door. Surely Black couldn't have hidden himself inside this box to spring a surprise on him ? There had been a little altercation the previous night over the tortoiseshell tabby three gardens away—and Black had received quite the worst of the subsequent exchanges. If this was a trick . . . !

With a push from his powerful right paw, he moved the box a couple of inches. Still the noise went on. This was certainly very strange. Suppose he got it on the floor, where he would be better able to deal with any sudden attack from within ?

In the pursuit of this policy Richard the Lion edged the thing nearer and nearer to the end of the table—and then—*whoosh* ! With a loud crash the object toppled over, and, his tail wagging defiance and his beautiful neck-ruff all a-bristle, he stared into the face of a strange man. He didn't like this man ; he didn't like the clothes he was wearing, nor the smell which surrounded them. He had seen men like him before—they came to work in the house, and they always upset his routine. They often made strange noises, and wanted to pick him up, but he never let them—there were only three people in this world he ever allowed to pick him up. Even the cook had to be content with a fugitive caress.

"Wot 'ave you bin a-doin' of ?" cried the strange man with the funny trousers.

Dick realized that the words constituted half a rebuke and half an attempt to make friends, and he merely gave his tail another wag.

Then Pringle, the butler, showed himself. He drew himself up haughtily as he stared at the electrician.

The latter wilted.

"I was just askin' this 'ere cat wot he was doin' of—he's knocked that box down from the table."

The butler received the information with a certain hauteur.

"Well, then, someone had better pick it up again," he suggested.

The electrician grinned.

"It ain't my place to do that, mister, but—oh, all right."

Watching him, Pringle was startled to find the speaker commit the audacity of removing the lid of the box.

"'Ere, what d'you think you're doing?" he demanded.

"Something funny about this," came back the reply. "Crikey, this *is* a funny 'at-box! . . . There's somethin' ticking inside."

As he bent over, the mind of Samuel Witts flashed back over a period of years. He was in the Flanders trenches again, listening—listening. . . .

"My God! I don't like this!" suddenly exclaimed the electrician. "Get me a bucket o' water."

"A bucket o' water?"

"You 'eard what I said—a bucket o' water—if you don't want yer blarsted napper blown off!"

Pringle, fear chilling the blood in his veins, looked up, to see that his master had returned.

Tiger, who had heard the last few words, caught the speaker by the shoulder.

"Are you mad, my man?" he asked.

"Mad, guv'nor? No—but I'll tell you what: you'd all have been stiff 'uns if I 'adn't been 'ere this morning. I was just telling your butler that this"—pointing to the hat-box—"as got a live bomb in it."

CHAPTER XIX

SAM SLADE BECOMES SLIMY

TIGER listened intently to what the expert was saying. They were significant words.

"I'll be as simple as possible," promised the man who had been called in, "and cut out all unnecessary technicalities. Briefly, Mr. Standish, the apparatus in the supposed hat-box consisted of a small explosive bomb worked by a time-fuse. But for the action of your cat, the most appalling things might have happened; as it was, the box falling off the hall table caused the very delicate working to get out of gear. The jar put it off its job, as it were," continued the speaker, permitting himself a small smile.

Standish rose.

"Well, I'm much obliged to you," he said. "Drink my health—and forget all about it. Remember that, please: forget all about it; I don't want this talked over. And that applies particularly to your electrician."

"Very good, Mr. Standish"—putting the note into his pocket; "I'll tell him what you say."

With the man gone, Tiger summoned Pringle.

"How much do the servants know of what happened here this morning?" he enquired of the butler.

Pringle started back a little as though he had been rebuked.

"They know nothing, sir—I kept what—er"—he paused for a moment—"information there was to myself. I gathered that you would not wish it talked about."

"Quite right. And, Pringle."

"Yes, sir?"

"Pringle, if you find life rather too exciting around this part, I shall quite understand if you give me your notice."

For a second time the butler drew back.

"I am very proud to serve you, sir—and I have no intention of leaving."

This sign of unexpected humanity warmed Standish's blood.

"Splendid," he replied. "I shan't forget it, Pringle."

"Thank you, sir."

Scarcely had the man left the room before Sonia's voice was heard outside.

"Tiger! Tiger, where are you?"

He rushed out to her and quickly put his arms around her yielding body.

"Darling!" she gasped. "You'll crush me to death!"

"Sorry," he mumbled back, "but I'm so damned glad to see you—that's why."

"But I haven't been gone above an hour—and, oh, Tiger, I've got a couple of such stunning hats."

To her surprise he burst into a loud laugh.

"'Stunning' is good," he returned.

"Why—what on earth do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing, sweetest. Just let me kiss you once more—that's all."

"Anything happened since I've been out?"

"Not a thing," he lied; "not a single little blessed thing. But it's going to happen now. Hold your face up."

He kissed her again.

Whilst this was going on in Chester Street, that grim-faced man Sir Harker Bellamy, C.M.G., sat listening to a report given him by one of the more recent additions to his staff. Had Tiger Standish been present, he would have been able to recognize the speaker as the young man who had come up to speak to him in the Centurions Club a few nights before.

"So you followed Hamme home?" interjected Bellamy.

"Yes, sir. And, what's more, I got into touch with his servant—a foul piece of work, but I think he's going to be useful. He's well in with Hamme—has his confidence to a great extent, I believe—but he's the type who will do anything for money."

"Don't spend too much," warned Bellamy.

"I won't, sir," laughed the younger man. "But a combination of wind-up and hard cash should do the trick."

"Well, I leave it to you."

"Thank you, Sir Harker."

As a direct result of the conversation which David Horlock, the Q.I. young man in question, had with Sam Slade, the latter, the same afternoon, requested a short interview with his employer, Aubrey Hamme.

Hamme was in a vile temper, but there was something in his servant's face which decided him to grant the request.

"Come along in here," he said, opening the door of the room he kept for his private affairs. "Now, what is it?"—biting the end of a cigar and standing with his back to the fireplace.

Slade coughed.

"Well, guv'nor," he stated, coming straight to the point, "I don't like the way things are going. Wait a minute," he went on, as Hamme took the cigar out of his mouth preparatory to launching a flood of oaths. "There's a fellow, who I think is a 'tec, hanging round. And—well, as I told you before, I don't like it."

"You don't like what?"

Slade became more decisive.

"I've been to the Moor once and I don't want to go there again—that's flat, guv'nor. Now, what I was thinking——"

Hamme became sarcastic.

"I should like to know very much what you were thinking *with*," was the reply.

"I was thinking that if you could let me have, say, a thousand——"

"Let you have say—*what*?"

"A thousand. That's not too much, is it, after what I've done? I want to get out of England, the sooner the better, and I must have money."

Aubrey Hamme's face became livid. His rage was so great that he could not speak: he just choked. At length, when he found a semblance of a voice, he spluttered:

"Get out before I kill you!"

"Is that the way to speak to me, guv'nor?" demanded his servant. The ex-inmate of Dartmoor looked aggrieved.

"You heard what I said—get out! If you show your ugly face inside this flat door again I'll tear your hide off. That's the last word."

"There's some as might give me a thousand," insinuated the threatened one.

"Well, go to them," exploded Hamme in a fresh outburst. "But if you do I swear to God I'll get you by the neck and tear you apart."

Sam Slade assumed his manservant manner.

"Very good, sir. I'm sorry you don't see your way clear to granting the request." He turned on his heel and was gone.

It took Aubrey Hamme at least twenty minutes to recover something of his usual manner; then he rang the bell, preparatory to ordering a drink. But no answer came. Storming through the flat, he found that his former servant had departed.

Whereat he blasphemed most volubly.

CHAPTER XX

THE FOUR MOURNING CARDS

YES, Sam Slade had gone ; as a matter of fact, he was well on his way to a certain house where he believed he could pick up his thousand. The man for his money was Tiger Standish.

He was just about to knock at the green-painted door in Chester Street when a police constable, walking more quickly than is the general rule of the uniformed officer, came swinging round the corner.

"Hi, you !" he called.

Slade, wondering if Aubrey Hamme had had the audacity to prefer some bogus charge against him, paid no attention to the hail. Once inside the house, he believed he would be safe. In any case, he wasn't going to bandy words with a common bobby on the doorstep of a prospective profitable client. It wouldn't have been so bad if the other had been a plain-clothes "dick"—but a copper . . . Yet the policeman would not be put off.

"Hi, you !" he called again.

Sam Slade still kept his face averted. He pressed a second time on the bell. Why the devil didn't somebody come ? Before anyone could answer the summons he found his body gripped by a pair of muscular arms.

"Didn't you hear me shouting at you ?" enquired the policeman, very irate. "You've got to come along to the station with me, Mr. Sam Slade."

The informer would have argued the point if he had not wisely been saving all his breath for physical

purposes. As it was, he felt himself getting the worst of the battle, and, in a last desperate attempt to clear himself of this incubus, he employed a trick he had once seen used in a brawl in an Algiers café. Taking his opportunity, he sank his teeth into the lobe of the policeman's left ear. Sam Slade had good teeth. . . .

The outraged (and enraged) constable split the welkin with his cry of agony. But, what was far more important, he loosened for a moment his grip on his would-be prisoner's body. Slade, as cunning as a fox, promptly booted him good and hard in the pit of the stomach—and collapsed in the arms of the outraged Pringle at the very moment that the butler opened the door to see what all the pother was about.

"Shut that door! SHUT THAT DOOR!"

"I beg your pardon?" This was Pringle at his Pringliest.

"I tell you to shut that door. Ah!" as the summons was obeyed.

"May I enquire, sir, what your business is?"

Sam Slade, with the door between him and the pugnacious policeman, was almost himself again.

"My business is with your master, Mr. Standish—he lives here, I believe?"

Pringle inclined his head.

"Well, tell him there's a gentleman wishes to see him immediately and on important business."

Pringle could not deny himself a small satisfaction.

"Did you say a 'gentleman', sir?" he enquired in his most suave tone.

"You heard me—a gentleman. Tell him I've come from Mr. Hamme."

It might have been a scene from a play, for no sooner had the word "Hamme" left the speaker's lips than a door opened and a stalwart figure appeared.

Pringle did his stuff.

"This gentleman"—stressing the word slightly—"says he has come to see you on important business."

Fourteen stone of bone, sinew, and muscle strode forward. He showed a clenched fist to the visitor.

"You see that?"

"Yes . . . I see it."

"Well, if you attempt any funny business, it's going to smash your face into pulp. That's just by way of warning. If you still want to see me—come along."

Tiger started to walk towards his den, but when he had taken a couple of steps he turned swiftly.

"What was all that noise about, Pringle?"

The butler looked at the visitor.

"This gentleman appeared to be having an altercation with a policeman."

"Having a what?"

"An altercation, sir—an argument."

"Oh!" Walking past the visitor, Tiger opened the front door; but, although he went out as far as the pavement and looked to right and left, there was no sign of a constable. As he returned, recollection smote him: this fellow who had called was familiar—he had seen his face somewhere quite recently. The fact gave a certain piquancy to the situation, whilst added savour came when he reminded himself that the other had been warned.

"Your friend the bobby's gone. Perhaps you will explain why?" he said. "No—you go first this time, and don't forget what I told you just now."

When the two were alone in the den with the door shut behind them, Standish pointed to a chair.

"Sit down—and keep your hands out of your pockets."

"I haven't got a gun."

"Perhaps you use a knife?"

"Don't be silly, Mr. Standish—I've come here as a friend."

"Splendid! Well, what about the policeman? But first of all, who are you? I've seen you somewhere. . . . Yes, I remember: you're Aubrey Hamme's servant, aren't you?"

"Yes; I told your butler that I'd come from Aubrey Hamme—blast him!"

"Certainly. But we'll hear about the policeman first. Why were you running away?"

"I wasn't running at all. It's like this, Mr. Standish. I've finished with Hamme. Things were getting a bit too hot, and having done one three years' stretch—see, I'm candid enough, aren't I?—I don't want to do another. There's been a 'tec hanging round the flat asking me questions until I'm dead sick of it; so I told Hamme today that I was finishing."

"I'm not saying I believe a word of it—but what did the worthy Hamme reply?"

"He kicked up terribly rough, got purple in the face, began to curse, and then last of all chucked me out. But I know a thing or two about Mr. Hamme." The look which accompanied the words was crafty.

"And you want to try to sell your information to me—is that it?"

The visitor became almost impressive.

"I've come here, Mr. Standish, to save your life."

"Why?"

"Because there's things going on with you concerned that's far too dirty for even me to handle. You think I'm bluffing, I dare say, but I know who killed that copper outside your father's house. I know——"

He was interrupted.

"All in good time. But, first of all, let's hear the story about the policeman. Did he recognize you as an ex-convict, or why was he so desperately anxious to stop you coming here?"

Sam Slade slapped the arm of the chair in which he was sitting.

"What a fool I've been!" he said bitterly. "He wasn't a copper at all—not a real copper. He was just one of the gang in disguise. That's why he didn't want me to come here. You've got to help me now, Mr. Standish," he went on in a quicker tone. "After I've told you what I'm going to, you must give me some money and get me out of the country; for if you don't, as true as there's a living God they'll have me—shoot me up, cut my throat, and

fling my body into the river. There's nothing those devils wouldn't do."

Tiger knew the man was honest. This fear was sincere; not even the cleverest actor could simulate such terror. Beads of perspiration were standing out on the man's narrow forehead; his lips had gone dry; there was a harsh rattle in his throat; his hands trembled; his whole body shook—yes, this man was mortally afraid. As well he might be, if what he said was true.

"Don't get the wind up," he said; "I'll give you some money and I'll see that you are got away. But I warn you——"

"You needn't," broke in the visitor. "I came here to get a thousand quid. I intended to get it by some means or other, because I simply had to get out of England. But since I've got the hang of things I want safety more than money."

"I understand," replied his host, "and you can rely on me—what's your name?"

"Slade—Sam Slade."

"You can rely on me, Slade, to see you through, providing you don't play any monkey tricks."

"Monkey tricks?" ejaculated the visitor. "Good heavens! Aren't you sure of me now? Do you think I'd have risked coming here——"

"All right, let it go that I *am* sure of you. Now what can you tell me?"

"A hell of a lot. I know the whole layout—and you shall have it for a thousand quid."

"Very well; I'll pay you a thousand pounds, providing your information is worth it. Leave it to me to decide."

"That's fair enough; I'll trust you, Mr. Standish."

"Good. Now, you say you know who killed the policeman who was on guard outside my father's house in Lowndes Square?"

"Yes, I do."

"Do you know who killed Lord Belshaven's secretary?"

"I can give a pretty good guess. Best of all, I know who Hans de Boo——"

The words he had been about to add were never uttered. There was a sharp *ping!* and the speaker's face underwent a startling change. The whole thing was uncanny. A second before, Sam Slade had been a living man; now, he was just a thing from which all life had gone. . . .

Tiger flung himself on the floor. He sensed what had happened. Someone lurking in the garden had shot the informer with either a revolver fitted with a silencer or a powerful air-gun.

What Sam Slade had started out to tell would now never be known.

Crawling to the door, for he realized that he also would be a good target for the assassin, he reached up, put his hand on the knob, and a moment later was tearing through the hall en route for the front door. Benny Bannister should be in his room over the garage; perhaps he had seen something. Perhaps . . . Oh, hell, if that had happened—if Benny had been shot too . . . ! But when he reached the garage door he heard the old professional footballer whistling cheerfully as he groomed the Bentley.

"Benny!" he called.

"Come in, guv'nor."

"Benny, have you seen a stranger hanging about here?"

"A stranger, guv'nor? No, that I 'aven't. It wouldn't be too 'ealthy for any strangers to muck about 'ere. . . . Why, what's the matter, guv'nor?"

Should he tell him?

He decided on the bolder policy.

"Benny, I was talking to a man just now in the den when he fell back dead; he'd been shot through the back of the head by someone lurking in the garden."

There was no need to request the chauffeur to accompany him: Bannister was off like a dog released from the leash. Tiger flung himself into his stride and the two reached the small pleasaunce together, only to be disappointed: the place was deserted. In fact, as Tiger

looked round he tried to tell himself that this latest tragedy had been nothing but the figment of a disordered dream. Yet . . .

"It's no good, Benny ; I was too late, curse it ! He probably got over that wall."

Benny scratched his head.

"That's about the size of it, guv'nor, I'm afraid. Shot through the 'ead, did you say ?"

"Shot through the head, Benny."

Bannister pushed a hand through his sparse locks.

"Ain't it time, guv'nor, this sort of thing was put a stop to ?" he asked. "Fust that copper . . . and now a bloke in your own study !"

Tiger kicked a stone out of the path.

"I'm up against a cunning devil, Benny—but I'll get him yet."

"I'm sure you will, guv'nor," came the encouraging retort.

Back in the house, Tiger rang up Sir Harold Lellant.

"I want you to send a trusted man round straight away," he told the Deputy Commissioner.

"Anything fresh happened ?"

"A lot."

There was a knock. He didn't want Pringle to see that ghastly exhibit, and so went to the door.

"Yes ?"

"A messenger-boy has just brought this, sir," stated the butler.

"This" was a largish-sized envelope of good quality paper. On it, typewritten, were his name and address.

"Thank you, Pringle. Special messenger, did you say ?"

"Yes, sir."

Taking it back into the study, Tiger tore open the envelope. Four neatly printed cards, all black-bordered, fell out on to the carpet.

Picking them up, Standish read them as under :

SAMUEL SLADE

Cut off in the midst of a useless life.

LORD QUORN

Suddenly, on the Continent.

SONIA

Wife of the Hon. Timothy Standish

(after a long and trying illness).

And, finally :

THE HON. TIMOTHY STANDISH

(No flowers, by request).

CHAPTER XXI

THE WRONG MAN

"I KNOW who Hans de Boo——"

What was it the man whose dead body was now lying in a mortuary, awaiting an inquest, had been about to say when the assassin's bullet crashed into his brain? That was the question which had been occupying Tiger's mind ever since the tragedy. Whatever it might have been, one thing was certain: it bore a vital importance to his determination to wipe out that modern thug Rahusen and all his evil tribe. Did the rat imagine that he could flout him with such impunity time after time? It was a humiliating reflection.

Because he could not let matters rest where they were, Standish took a stroll that night. He was not the Tiger his world knew: there had been a metamorphosis in his appearance. The man who slouched down Baker Street looked to be a loafer of the worst type; he wore a cap pulled well down over his eyes; instead of collar and tie he had a scarf knotted loosely around his neck; he appeared unshaven and suffering from the "hangover" of a recent debauch. With his powerful frame and scowling expression he was an individual from whom the sensitive-minded turned uneasily away. Such gave him plenty of elbow-room, even stepping out into the gutter rather than risk personal contact with him. For this prowler looked as though he had recently emerged from some hide-away in Soho or a scabrous den in the East End. He was a human excrescence on the body social.

Tiger, absorbed in his new role, felt complimented

rather than otherwise by the half-frightened glances sent in his direction. He turned down Blandford Street and plunged from this thoroughfare into the network of side-streets that lay to the right of Portman Square. He was taking the same course as on the night when he had endeavoured to catch up Hans de Boo after the latter's visit to him in Chester Street.

Reaching the top of the cul-de-sac in which the warehouse through whose door de Boo had disappeared was situated, he made sure that the revolver he had brought with him was in working order and proceeded on his way. He was in the mood for trouble—he was not only looking for it, he was asking that something calling for a full-blooded scrap might occur.

The fog which had descended on London at four o'clock that afternoon, and had continued without causing much inconvenience, now suddenly increased in density. It was almost as though a well-disposed Fate was giving him a helping hand.

Tiger had exceedingly good sight, however, and he was able to observe the body of a man pressed tightly against what appeared to be the doorway of the warehouse—that same doorway through which Hans de Boo had made his precipitate flight. Was the place being guarded? It looked like it. His hands itching to get hold of something—preferably this fellow's neck—he sauntered up to the man.

"Got a match, mate?" asked Tiger, in a raucous tone.

The other eyed him in a hostile manner.

"What are you doing, loafing about here?" he retorted.

This was all that Tiger wanted. Suddenly reaching out, he caught the fellow's nose between thumb and index finger of his right hand and gave it a violent tweak.

"I didn't ask for your lip," he remarked; "I wanted a match."

By way of reply the other kicked the door at the back

of him violently with his heel. Immediately a similar thing happened to what had occurred on the previous occasion: a number of men poured out in a flood and flung themselves on Standish.

The latter almost yelped with joy. Here was action! Three went down before his well-aimed sledge-hammer blows, but this crowd employed better tactics than their predecessors: overwhelmed by weight of numbers, Tiger eventually was dragged into the warehouse, an important factor in the proceedings being a huge sack that was thrown over his head. The best of scrappers are apt to be handicapped when vision is taken from them in this manner, and Tiger found himself on a parallel with a certain notable figure in Biblical history—the blinded Samson.

Eventually he cooled down, because he realized that he was only making himself ridiculous in the eyes of his enemies; and with the comparative cessation of his wrath came enlightenment.

"Take that sack off," ordered a voice—a voice that Tiger, infuriated as he was, thought he recognized.

The command was obeyed. The sack removed, Standish stared straight into the face of—*Sir Harker Bellamy!*

The latter became livid with rage.

"You blasted fools!" he roared. "You've got the wrong man."

Forgetting all his troubles, the captured one flung back his head and burst into a fit of gargantuan laughter. This was too rich! In fact, it was so funny as to be positively devastating. He laughed and laughed and laughed.

"Something went wrong with your staff work, Bellamy," he stated, when at length normal breathing became possible.

But before he could listen to the reply of The Mole—the little man was still dancing mad with fury—the sight of the cripples crawling forward made him shriek again.

"Sorry, you chaps—but, damn it, you did ask for it. How was I to know you were Q.1 blokes?"

Sir Harker Bellamy forced himself to speak.

"Come with me, Standish—I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER XXII

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

It was in Bellamy's private office that the talk took place. The two drove there in The Mole's fast car. Shutting the door and pulling out a box of cigars, Bellamy plunged into his subject without any verbiage.

"What the devil do you think you were up to tonight?" he demanded first of all.

Tiger, who was thoroughly enjoying the situation, cocked one long leg over the arm of his chair and puffed at his Havana with evident relish.

"I might ask you the same question," he retorted. "What the deuce do you mean by butting in on my affairs? I've told you once about it—have I to get really nasty with you, Bellamy?"

But for the twinkle in his eye The Mole might have imagined that the speaker was perfectly serious. As it was, he tried a different kind of tactic.

"Don't you think this farce has gone on long enough, Standish?" he enquired. "We're both working for the same end and after the same man, and yet we're in opposition. It's absurd. If you weren't so damnably pig-headed——"

"Now, now, now!" retorted his visitor. "Don't let either of us lose his temper again, it's so exhausting. And I want to retain my respect for you, Bellamy."

Reading correctly the danger signal in his listener's eyes, he continued:

"I quite see your point of view, but you know what I told you in the beginning: this fellow Rahusen is

my meat. He's taken it on himself to issue the most impudent challenges to me, and I'm not going to rest until I get him."

"So I observed from the newspapers," somewhat satirically observed Bellamy.

Tiger exploded.

"That was all bunk—so much eyewash. Journalese gone mad. But still"—calming himself—"the main fact was correct. There's no doubt that Rahusen, the man who has challenged me, is the same fellow who is at the back of these ghastly murders, which, of course, puts it up to me all the more."

The Mole shook his head.

"You can't do it. Who the deuce do you think you are? I tell you, Standish, you can't do this thing on your own. It's perfectly preposterous."

"I'm going to try."

"You conceited young pup," roared the Chief of Q.I., "don't you realize, that in the process of trying you're endangering not only your own life—which isn't worth so much—but the lives of your wife and father? Now, if you'd only let me help——"

Standish sat forward.

"I'm not going to crawl to you, Bellamy. I told you in this room a few days ago that I was going to see this thing through on my own—and I've not altered my mind. All the same," he went on, "I don't see why we shouldn't exchange notes. Who's to speak first?"

Bellamy's patience could not be restrained.

"Listen to me," he snapped. "I took some men to that warehouse tonight because I've discovered that it's used by a fellow called Hans de Boo."

"I could have told you that, my friend—but carry on."

"This Hans de Boo," continued The Mole, restraining himself, "is supposed to be an antique dealer on a big scale. He lives at Church Street, Mayfair, and has leased that warehouse as a repository for his goods. Incidentally"—and here the speaker looked keenly at

Standish—"I've been able to trace a connection between him and our old friend Aubrey Hamme."

"That's interesting. But it would be more interesting still if you had been able to trace the connection between Hans de Boo and Rahusen."

"That will come in time. Now, what puzzles me is that de Boo's record seems perfectly satisfactory. I've made enquiries of the passport people and in other directions, and at the moment I must say there isn't a thing we can hang on him."

"There is," rejoined Standish.

"What?"

"A piece of crape—and at the first opportunity I intend to do it."

There was a knock on the door.

"Who's that?" demanded Standish.

"I expect it's Raynor—he's been working late tonight."

The private secretary of the Secret Service Chief entered the room at the word "Come" and handed Bellamy a card. The latter stared at it through his monocle and then passed it without comment to Tiger.

Standish did not evidence the same masterly self-control as his companion.

"My hat!" he exclaimed. And then, more quietly, dwelling on each word: "*M-y h-a-t!*"

Bellamy turned to his secretary.

"Tell Mr. Hans de Boo that, although I do not usually receive visitors at so late an hour, I shall be pleased if he will come up."

"Yes, Sir Harker."

"And, Raynor."

"Yes, Sir Harker?"

"Be on hand in case of any funny stuff. Is he alone?"

"I didn't see anyone else with him, Sir Harker."

"All right, show him up."

The visitor who preceded Raynor into the room was debonair and impressively master of himself.

"I see you have preceded me, Mr. Standish." And then, turning to the Chief of Q.1: "I must apologize for this late call, Sir Harker Bellamy, but my need is urgent."

Bellamy made a sign to Raynor, who left the room. Then:

"I wasn't aware, Mr.—" studying the card which he picked up, "oh yes, Mr. Hans de Boo, that I had the pleasure of your acquaintance?"

The thrust was parried.

"Not in person, perhaps, but I do not think you will deny the statement that you have been taking a considerable interest in my affairs of late?"

"I shouldn't think of denying it. But please sit down; you will be more comfortable in that chair."

"Thank you, I prefer to stand."

"As you please. Well, Mr. Hans de Boo, since you are here I have no doubt you will give me a very adequate reason for calling."

"Certainly; that is my intention. I should have gone to Scotland Yard, had not the fact been brought home to me—in a manner there was no mistaking—that, as I stated just now, you have recently been taking a very deep interest in my affairs. I trust you have found them in order?"

The Mole did not bat an eyelid.

"Perfectly, I'm glad to say, so far as my investigations go; there does not seem any reason why you should not remain in England."

"You are very kind," came the counter-stroke. "And, that being so, I trust now I shall be left in peace—both I and my poor affairs."

Bellamy thrust his pugnacious chin forward. "Suppose we come to the point, Mr. de Boo. Suppose we cut the cackle, in other words, and get ^{Mr.} down to brass tacks? Exactly why have you called here tonight?"

"I will be brief," said the other. "I do not know from what source you gathered your dubious suspicions that I was an 'undesirable alien'—I believe that is the

term usually employed in such cases?—but whether it came from this gentleman here”—giving Tiger a very short, curt bow—“or not is immaterial. I have called tonight to register my protest against having my foot-steps dogged and my private business arrangements pried into—in short, Sir Harker Bellamy, I am tired and weary of your infernal meddling. And I give you due warning that unless it stops immediately I shall seek legal protection. Is that quite clear?”

“Admirably. You state your case with a clarity that is altogether praiseworthy. Is that all you have to say?”

“That is all I have to say. I wish you both a good evening.” With a further brief bow to each, the caller turned and made a thoroughly satisfactory exit. On the stage he would undoubtedly have received a generous round of applause.

It was not until a full minute had passed that the silence was broken. Then Tiger made an observation.

“I’ll be damned!” he said. “You’ve got to admire the fellow’s nerve, Bellamy.”

“I am lost in admiration of it,” was the reply. “Now, I wonder exactly what his reason was for coming here at such an hour?”

Standish laughed.

“He told you, didn’t he?—that he was tired of your infernal meddling.”

“A rat when cornered will fight,” was The Mole’s somewhat enigmatic comment. “Have another cigar. And don’t say anything more for at least five minutes, please. I want to think.”

When the five minutes had passed it was the telephone, and not Tiger Standish’s voice, that broke in on Bellamy’s reflection.

“Now, who the devil . . . ?”

Tiger watched his former chief change colour as he listened.

“All right, I’ll come straight over. Wait for me,” were the words he sent across the wire.

Bellamy replaced the receiver with meticulous care—a sure sign that he was deeply moved.

“That was Lellant, at the Yard,” he said in a metallic voice. “Belshaven, the Foreign Secretary, has been murdered in a box at the Opera.”

CHAPTER XXIII

THE THIRD MURDER

"MURDERED?" ejaculated Tiger, springing to his feet.

"Murdered. Stabbed in the neck, like that poor devil of a secretary. They've got him—as I was afraid they would. Now, no more talking; put on your hat and coat if you're coming. Do you want to or not?"

Standish's tone was as brusque as his own.

"Do you think I'm going to be left out of a thing like this?"

"All right—but don't talk on the way."

It was not until the two found themselves in Sir Harold Lellant's private room at Scotland Yard that Bellamy discovered his voice again. Flinging himself into a chair by the side of the familiar mahogany desk, he chewed fiercely on the end of a dead cigar and stared hard at the Assistant Commissioner.

"What are the facts?" he demanded.

Sir Harold Lellant studied some writing on a piece of paper.

"This is all we know at present," he said. "Lord Belshaven left his house in Carlton House Terrace this evening at seven forty-five to go to the Covent Garden Opera. It was a performance of *Tristan und Isolde*——"

"Never mind about the opera; let's concentrate on the man."

Lellant ignored the outburst.

"Don't interrupt the witness," he said with a slight smile. "Arrived at Covent Garden Theatre, Belshaven, who was alone, went straight to his box. So far as is

known, he did not leave the box at the first interval, and was actually seen talking to some friends later. It was at the end of the second act that the discovery was made. Apparently Belshaven had arranged that young Jocelyn Brent, an attaché home from Paris on leave, should come to his box at the end of the second interval. Brent was seen leaving the box in a state of terrible agitation and demanding that a policeman be found immediately."

"Was Belshaven dead by that time?"

Lellant nodded.

"Quite dead."

"What time was this?"

"Ten-five."

The Mole looked across at Standish; his glance was full of significance. At 10.5 both had been listening to the spirited harangue of that mysterious personality Hans de Boo."

"Sorry, Lellant, to interrupt. What remains?"

"Very little. A policeman was found, he took what particulars were available, and the news was rushed through to me here immediately. As it happened, I was working on the Sutton murder case"—pointing to a voluminous file to the left of the desk.

"How was the murder done?"

"With a knife."

"And stabbed through the neck?"

"Clean through the jugular vein."

Bellamy frowned through his monocle.

"But didn't you have the fellow guarded?" he asked sharply.

"The Special Branch wanted to allocate a detective to him, but he wouldn't listen to it. A brave man."

"H'm! And a fool."

"Any comments?"

"Only two at the moment; both are obvious."

"I shall be glad to hear them."

"Well, it's perfectly plain, of course, that the madman who attempted to stab Belshaven the other night, and

killed Maltravers, his secretary, instead, took a second chance tonight—and succeeded.”

“What’s the other?”

“That’s equally obvious—that the Yard will come in for a hell of a talking to at the next Cabinet meeting, which, by the way, is tomorrow afternoon. I don’t envy you, Lellant. But listen: this is up to me as well as you. It directly concerns my Department, and if there are any hard words to be handed out—as of course there will be—I shall have my share also.”

“Which means?”

“That I will give you every possible help.”

“Good man.”

“Now what about you, Standish?”

Tiger yawned.

“Do I come into this?”

“Yes,” said Lellant slowly; “because this is the third murder of the same kind—and the first victim, you remember, was the policeman I sent to guard your father’s house.”

Tiger somewhat ostentatiously stifled a second yawn.

“In that case, I *am* in it. . . . But I must confess that at the moment I don’t see what the deuce I can do. Two killings in one day—it’s almost an epidemic.”

Sir Harker Bellamy swerved round on him.

“What do you mean—two?”

This time it was Lellant who made a pretence of yawning.

“Hasn’t Standish told you?” he rallied the other. “There was a nice little spot of homicide at his house this morning.”

“And you never told me?” accused Bellamy.

“Oh,” said Tiger, rising, “I never was much good at spinning yarns. Lellant here will be only too willing to oblige, I feel sure—and he uses much better English than I. Good night; I’m off to bed.”

He left the two staring after him.

“We at the Embassy are very pleased,” said the speaker.

"You ought to be," replied Hans de Boo.

Emil Voltag, murders emissary, smiled conciliatorily on the other.

"I have the honour to inform you that a large bonus will be paid in connection with last night's affair. We at the Embassy"—repeating his parrot-cry—"are all agreed that the business was beautifully managed. Pardon me—but may I enquire if——?"

Hans de Boo broke in.

"If the police have any suspicions? Yes, both Scotland Yard and the British Secret Service are full of suspicions, but they have no definite proof—and definite proof is the only thing that counts."

"Exactly. Yet the Ambassador thinks that for the time being you perhaps might find it convenient to travel to the Continent—in search, of course, of more antiques—in the château country of France, for instance. . . . There is a 'plane to Amsterdam, I understand, at eleven-thirty."

"I'll think about it," was the reply, as the visitor picked up hat and gloves from the William-and-Mary table.

Hans de Boo, in spite of the handsome dividend he found that murder was paying, was not sorry to see him gone. He had a busy morning. Twenty minutes later he was interviewing Aubrey Hamme.

"I'm going abroad," he told the other brusquely. "So try to keep yourself out of mischief. You mis-handled the Slade business very badly, let me tell you."

Hamme blustered.

"How was I to know the fellow meant to rat?"

"You shouldn't have trusted him so much—or, rather, you shouldn't have been sufficiently a fool to let him learn so many of your secrets. However, I hope too much harm has not been done. I saw Standish last night in Sir Harker Bellamy's office, and if he had known the whole truth—or even guessed it—I should never have left that room a free man. That was one of the reasons why I went; I simply had to know how much Slade had blabbed."

Hamme shifted uneasily in his chair.

"Whatever he blabbed, he knew I had nothing to do with—" he changed the original words as he saw the warning look in the other's eye—"certain mysterious deaths, shall we say?"

"I wouldn't trust you in that direction."

There seemed every prospect of a storm blowing up, but Hamme, after gnawing his lower lip, laughed the tenseness off.

"That's all right so far as I'm concerned," he retorted. "But you've still got a long way to go, you know. Not all your schemes have come off. Standish is still alive—and so are his wife and father."

"I am leaving my private affairs until the end."

After a few more words the two parted.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PRIME MINISTER IS FRACTIOUS

THE Prime Minister crashed his fist on to the table below him.

"Results, gentlemen—they are the only thing that count with me—results."

Sir Harker Bellamy looked at his colleague from Scotland Yard and nodded.

"Good morning," he said with characteristic curtness, and led the way out of the room. "If the electors of this country took the old man at his word, he'd be out of office next week," he commented as he stepped into Downing Street.

"I quite agree," replied Lellant; "but these reeds that are painted to look like iron always make the most noise, and he's got a stormy passage in front of him in the House this afternoon. Have you lunched?"

"Yes, thanks—had a bite before I came along. Well"—grinning sardonically—" 'Results, gentlemen, results.' "

"Oh, go to hell!" said the Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard good-humouredly.

Before he had walked many yards up Whitehall the Chief of Q.1 recognized an unmistakable figure coming in his direction. Those giant strides could only belong to one man. Tiger Standish, as he approached, gave his former superior a mock Fascist salute.

"Hail, O Great White Chief!"

"You seem good-tempered this morning."

"That's more than I can say about you. What is it—liver, or that distressing flatulence after meals?"

"It's the Prime Minister, if you want to know."

"Ah, that's worse still. What's the particular trouble now?"

"He wants results."

"About these killings? . . . Well, I don't know that you can blame him."

Bellamy, with an unexpected friendliness, linked his arm inside Standish's.

"Look here, Tiger," he said, in such a wheedling tone that the younger man thought he must be dreaming, "come along to the office for a minute."

"All right—but why the pealing bells of welcome?"

"Don't be a fool," snapped Bellamy in quite his old manner.

Tiger's frivolous mood left him as he sat in the well-remembered room. But he had had to pretend to be light-hearted—if he hadn't he'd have gone stark raving mad. When he thought of how easily that poor devil of a policeman and Belshaven had been murdered, and then realized that the two people dearest to him in the world—Sonia and his father—were both on the killer's list . . . Well, it didn't bear thinking about!

"Why the abstraction?" enquired The Mole.

Tiger sat up.

"Well, Bellamy, I was just considering what a pair of hopeless asses we must appear to our friend the enemy. So far he seems to have won all the moves."

Bellamy, in the act of pulling a cigar-box out of a drawer of his desk, found time to expostulate.

"That's all very well," he said, "but we're solid flesh and blood, and he knows where we can be found. Rahusen——"

"Do you know," cut in Standish, "I'm just wondering whether old Pickle Face is really at the back of these jobs, and if he hasn't put up some kind of target for us to shoot at whilst he remains in the wings all the while laughing his guts out."

The Mole considered the suggestion.

"London's a big place," he said sententiously, "and a man could hide in it for a lifetime if he didn't take unnecessary risks. But," he ended, "I feel sure that Pickle Face, as you call him, is directing this new campaign."

"All right, have it your own way."

"Still," continued the Chief of Q.1, "up to now we are merely clutching at shadows—working in the dark. . . . It's a case of having patience, my boy. How many times in my life have I found that the patient man wins in the end!"

His visitor declined the proffered cigar.

"Too early in the morning; I'll have a pipe."

Whilst he was stuffing tobacco into the well-seasoned briar he asked a question:

"Did you clean out that warehouse thoroughly the other night?"

"You mean the place off Baker Street? Yes."

"When I first made its acquaintance Hans de Boo had a good alibi—almost as good a one as he had last night. I followed him to that damned place, watched him go through the door, and then, when I was about to peep-bo, a number of men poured out, and if I hadn't learned a trick or two of jiu-jitsu from a pal of mine named Dalamore I should have been for it. As it was, I looked very much of a fool when a bobby came up and a watchman named Biggs told him that he couldn't understand what I was talking about, as he'd been on the premises all the time and——"

"Biggs is an ex-convict; I had his record looked up, and he did a vanishing trick."

"Well, that's something gained, anyway. Hans de Boo," went on Bellamy, "did use that warehouse for storing the furniture in which he's supposed to deal. But here's a significant point: part of the floor had been recently cemented over. I imagine that until you ran him to earth he had a hide-away below-stairs, but he wasn't taking any chances: that's why he covered up his tracks."

"Altogether, I think Mr. de Boo will pay for watching."

Bellamy became very grim.

"Don't worry ; he's being watched. And now let me tell you a few facts about last night's affair. I've got them from Lellant."

"You mean the Belshaven business ?"

"Yes. Some of the attendants at the Opera have told the police that a foreign-looking man, in what they call 'faultless evening dress', was observed to leave Lord Belshaven's box towards the end of act two."

" 'Foreign-looking' is rather vague, surely ?"

"I know—and the fellow may have been disguised, of course—put some stuff on his face to darken his skin. Care to see what it was done with ?"

"You mean the killing ?"

Bellamy, without replying, pulled open a second drawer of his desk.

"There you are," he stated, taking from it a wooden-handled knife, the broadish blade of which measured perhaps seven inches.

Standish gazed at the ghastly relic with interest.

"Looks commonplace enough," he commented.

"It is commonplace. One doesn't associate a butcher's knife one can buy for sixpence at Pulling's Universal Stores with gentlemen attired in 'faultless evening dress', even if they are of foreign extraction."

"Is that what it is—a Pulling's knife ?"

"Yes ; and, what's more important, both the other crimes have been committed with the same type of weapon. Three lives lost for a complete outlay of eighteenpence—ironical, isn't it ?"

CHAPTER XXV

TRAGEDY IN THE AIR

It was nearing tea-time when Tiger left Sir Harker Bellamy's office. Almost the first thing he saw, as he stepped into Whitehall, was an evening newspaper placard :

AIR LINER DISASTER

The newsvendor was doing a brisk trade, and Tiger joined the queue. Blazoned across the front page of the paper was a line of gigantic type :

20 LIVES LOST IN AIR LINER TRAGEDY

In the column below Standish read :

Disaster, swift and staggering to the imagination, overtook the international air liner F.P.14 this morning, whilst travelling from Croydon to Amsterdam.

Only brief details are yet obtainable, but fire would appear to have broken out in the doomed liner, and, according to our present information, all lives on board were lost.

With the paper clutched in his hand, Standish tore back to the offices of Q.I.

"Seen this ?" he cried, pushing the sheet before Sir Harker's nose.

The latter made a comment after reading.

"I wonder," he mused ; "I wonder."

"You wonder what?"

"Hans de Boo was on that liner," stated Bellamy.
"I wonder . . ."

"If he died with the rest?"

"Somehow," returned the Chief of Q.I., "I cannot see Hans de Boo fading out quite so simply as that."

Returning home, Tiger found a horde of reporters and newspaper photographers waiting for him. These were fresh battalions; he had spent the earlier part of the day in evading their colleagues, but these new arrivals surrounded him so effectually there could be no chance of escape. Summarized, the burden of their cry was, "You told the world yesterday, Mr. Standish, that you would hold yourself responsible for the capture of this mass murderer. Well, now that he has replied by doing a third killing—what about it?"

Hating the ordeal, Standish smiled. His habitual good temper saved the situation.

"Listen, gentlemen," he said, when the most voluble had come to an end. "Do you expect me to reach out my hand and grab this fellow from the air? As a matter of fact, the *Sentinel* grossly exaggerated my remarks—and now, if you please, I want to see my wife. Why not go down to Scotland Yard and interview Sir Harold Lellant if you want some copy?"

He was as determined as they, and so the pressmen had to let him go.

In the hall he was met by a flushed and almost tearful Sonia.

"What's the matter, darling?"

She caught hold of his arm and dragged him towards the den.

"I must talk to you, Tiger—and I must laugh, because if I don't I shall be sure to cry."

His wife was not the type of girl who wasted her hysterics, and so it was with tender care that he drew her down on his knee.

"Now," he said, "spill the beans."

After putting an arm around his neck and laying her cheek against his for a moment, Sonia told her story. So it was that Tiger was forced to be an attentive listener for the second time within a short space.

"And now what do you think of it?" cried his wife, having rounded off her narrative with a laugh that was rather too high-pitched in tone to be entirely natural.

"My dear," he said, "it's the funniest thing I've heard for years. They ought to do it on the wireless; it would improve those punk variety shows of theirs. Now grab this fag and let's laugh together."

The situation would have made an ironist smile. It represented another chapter in that enormous volume of human comedy known as the Servant Question. White, a recently arrived parlourmaid at Chester Street, had been voted, even by a highly critical housekeeper, as "a treasure" until a few hours previously. Hearing that she had been suddenly taken ill, Sonia had gone herself to the girl's bedroom to express her sympathy and to ascertain what exactly was the trouble. Apparently the girl had only herself to blame: she had overeaten at lunch and was paying the penalty. A complication was that she suffered from some slight internal trouble which made gluttony exact its proper punishment. Result: a rather bad liver attack.

Now, instead of being grateful for her mistress' kindly interest, White developed surprising tantrums for a girl of her age directly Sonia showed herself. A further development in this domestic drama came with a message from the cook that White's young man, on his way from one job to another (he was a gas-fitter by trade), had called, and, hearing that his inamorata was "poorly", had expressed his determination to pay her a call—even though she were in her bedroom!

Tiger, running through the series of events narrated by Sonia, having reached this point, indulged in a second furious burst of laughter.

"Why, precious," he exclaimed, "this thing ought to be filmed as well as broadcast. Think of the title:

'Plumbing the depths ; a harrowing account of a gas-fitter's amours'. It would draw the town !"

"Be serious, old man," returned Sonia. "Good servants aren't to be had every day—and until she lost her stupid head in this silly fashion, Mrs. Bailey said that White was one of the best parlourmaids she had ever known."

"But I must have my laugh—it's the first opportunity I've been given to grin for days. Tell me, child : did you see the *garçon* of the gas in question ?"

It was now Sonia's turn to throw back her head.

"Yes ; a most extraordinary fellow ; he kept wrinkling his nose like a rabbit."

"An occupational disease peculiar to gas-fitters," returned her husband. "You see"—stooping to illustrate the point—"bending down near gas-stoves on the look for leaks, the muscles of the nose——"

"Stop it !" cried Sonia. "Do let me tell the end part again, it's so funny—funny now that I've got you to listen to me."

"Carry on, my dear."

"Well, when I heard that George (that's apparently his name) insisted on seeing the 'lidy of the house'—bless your life, Mrs. Bailey, the housekeeper, wouldn't do !—I went out into the kitchen myself, and there he was, a very earnest-looking young man with spectacles and hair so *en brosse* that really at first sight I thought he must be still wearing his bowler hat. He did his nose-twitching at me and frowned. 'Are you Mrs. Standish ?' he asked. 'I am,' I said. 'I suppose you want to know how White is ?' 'Yes, I do ; I'm very concerned about her.' 'Well, you needn't be,' I replied ; 'she's merely suffering from a billious attack brought on by eating too much pork—which her doctor told her never to touch—at lunch.' 'I wishes to see her,' he then said. 'I'm afraid you can't do that ; it's quite out of the question.' And then what do you think he said, Tiger ?"

"Don't ask me."

"He called me something like a blasted aristocrat and stamped out as though the place was on fire."

"He'd just detected a fresh leak through that nose of his somewhere in Park Lane, my child. The infernal impudence! Does he imagine I keep a house going purely to allow him to do his courting? What did White say?"

"She became hysterical—and I'm afraid we shall soon be minus a parlourmaid."

"Well, the sooner she marries Twitch-nose, the better, I imagine. I hope she has lots of kids and lots of washing to do for 'em. And now, my dear, oh, dry those tears, because after dinner I'm going to take you to the Centurions Club. You want some change and a little brightness after this perfectly harrowing incident."

"Tiger," she exclaimed, "you're just too dear."

Only the warning cough of Pringle at the door prevented a fresh outburst of enthusiastic embracing. They became sufficiently sensible to listen to the first news bulletin of the B.B.C. The first announcement compelled their attention :

We very much regret to announce that a terrible disaster overtook the international air liner F.P.14, which left Croydon Aerodrome this morning for Amsterdam. By some means which has not yet been explained, a disastrous fire broke out on the airship, which, contrary to earlier reports, did not descend in the Channel but became diverted from her course, so that the wreckage of the machine was subsequently found on the northern coast of France, near Calais. So far as can be ascertained at present, all lives, including those of the pilot and mechanic, were lost. Included in the list of dead was M. Huymans, the eminent Belgian banker, Mme. Lamarque, the famous prima donna who was to sing at the Brussels Opera House, and M. Hans de Boo, a celebrated Amsterdam antique merchant.

Sonia reached out and switched off.

"I want to think," she said. "I can't bear to listen

to anything more. Oh, I'm so glad that man's dead."

"What man?"

"Tiger, you know whom I mean—Hans de Boo."

He had to divert her mind if possible.

"You're glad a fellow creature is dead, Sonia? My dear, suppose the vicar heard you!"

"I know it's a terrible thing to confess, but I *am* glad. For that man was evil and, what's more, I keep to my opinion—I'm sure he was sent here by Rahusen."

She jumped up and perched herself on the arm of her husband's chair.

"Tiger, old man."

"Well?"

"Tiger, suppose he were Rahusen himself?"

"WHAT!"

"Suppose he were Rahusen himself?"

"But it's impossible! Do you think I shouldn't be able to recognize my old pal Pickle Face when I saw him?"

But Sonia would not be persuaded.

"I feel sure somehow I'm right."

"But a man can't go about with two faces, love-kins."

"I know; it sounds absurd . . . perhaps it *is* absurd. Yet, all the same, I've a feeling here"—putting a hand on her breast—"that I am right."

The Centurions Club that night was crowded, but amidst the throng Tiger, escaping from the hubbub for a moment to get a drink, espied someone he knew. Charles Witham was a young man about town who held some mysterious job in the Air Ministry. Talk, as they sipped their whisky-and-sodas, turned on the appalling air mishap that afternoon. Witham looked at the smoke of his cigarette.

"There's something fishy behind that, Tiger, old man," he said; "something that the papers haven't got hold of as yet. But of course they will," he

continued; "it's too sensational to be kept out of print."

"What's too sensational?"

"Why, the cause of the accident. The pilot was murdered—and then someone must have set fire to the liner."

Standish drummed on the end of the bar with the knuckles of his right hand. Words were returning to him—those same words that Sir Harker Bellamy had used only a few hours previously.

"You say the pilot was murdered, Charles?"

"Absolutely. We've had a confidential report through. He was found shot—and the bullet entered the back of his head. What about that for the plot of a shocker?"

"I'm not interested in plots for shockers," returned his audience; "but I should like to know exactly how you got your information."

"Sorry, old boy, can't tell you that; it's highly confidential. But you can take it that I am not pulling your leg."

After seeing his wife safely to bed, Standish rang up Sir Harold Lellant. He thought that the Assistant Commissioner should know the gist of what he had been told.

Lellant, whom he located at Scotland Yard instead of at his residence, gave him some equally surprising news in return.

"Harker's been round to see me, and I don't wonder now that he thinks there's something queer about this air liner business."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because a woman calling herself de Boo, and claiming that she is the wife of the well-known antique merchant of Amsterdam, has been speaking to me on the telephone. She says it is not true for the papers to announce that her husband was on the air liner F.P.14, and so consequently he cannot be numbered amongst the dead."

"Then where the deuce is her husband?" snapped Standish.

"She wouldn't tell me at first, but later admitted that he was an inmate of a mental home. Naturally enough, she wanted the fact kept secret. I'll tell you something just before you ring off, Standish."

"You've told me enough."

"Well, here's something else: that man Bellamy knows his job."

"You needn't have told me that. . . . Good night."

"Good night, Standish."

Tiger had plenty to think about during the next half an hour. Yes, "that man Bellamy" did know his job. He had the inestimable quality of being able to think ahead. He had foreseen something of this sort, and perhaps—who knew?—the information received by the Air Ministry had been sent by one of The Mole's own men. If it had not meant giving his pride such a severe jolt he would have rung up Bellamy, late as it was, and confessed that he had been a fool to think he could manage this thing on his own. Wouldn't he take him back on the old terms?

But that, in the present circumstances, was out of the question.

Was there anything in Sonia's idea that Hans de Boo and Rahusen were one and the same man? It seemed incredible—but, after what had happened, was there anything, no matter how fantastic, that could rightly be discredited?

He filled and lit another pipe. The house was strangely quiet—and then he remembered he had sent Pringle to bed half an hour before.

Perhaps it was because this duel had degenerated into fighting phantoms ineffectually that when the ring came at the front door he started to his feet like a man whose nerves are not under proper control. Who could it be at this time of night?

Taking a revolver out of a table drawer, he left the

room and walked down the hall. Flinging open the front door, after unlocking it, he stared out at a number of men dressed in dark clothes. What was that they were carrying? Then, with a gasp of astonishment, he recognized their burden.

It was a coffin!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE STRANGE TALE OF AN UNWANTED COFFIN

A COFFIN !

A coffin being delivered to him, and at eleven o'clock at night !

"What the deuce do you fellows want ?" he demanded.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said the one who appeared the foreman, "but we 'ad orders to bring it 'ere. Seems as 'ow it was a kind of rush job."

The speaker appeared honest enough, and Tiger's sense of perplexity increased. He had to get to the bottom of this business. He recalled the mystery hat-box, which, but for the purest accident, might have blown his home into smithereens.

"Where are you from ?" he now asked.

"Langham's, sir—five-eighty-nine Wigmore Street."

He didn't know the name, but imagined that it represented an important firm of morticians.

"Well, you've come to the wrong house, my man—there's nobody dead here."

The foreman peered at him and then consulted a paper which he took from his waistcoat pocket.

"But this *is* the address, sir. See for yourself."

Tiger, stretching out a hand to take the paper, was very much on his guard. This visit appeared to have all the characteristics of a fresh Rahusen ruse.

But as he looked at the paper he read :

*The Hon. T. O. Standish,
125 Chester Street, S.W.1.*

There could be no mistake about that.

"I see," he remarked. And then his eye caught the plate on the coffin. "Stand back there a minute."

The three men obeyed the order, and Tiger stooped. The next moment he felt the blood rushing to his brain ; for this is what he read, deeply engraved on the brass plate :

*James Overbury Standish, 12th Earl of Quorn, in his
65th year.*

What he would have done had not a policeman suddenly materialized was always afterwards a matter of conjecture with him. He might have endeavoured to knock the heads of the three men together, afterwards braining them with the coffin ; but the police constable put a stop to that. He stood, a stolid, impressive figure, looking at the group, plainly anxious to know what was, to use the vernacular of his kind, "going on there". Tiger recovered himself sufficiently to address him in a more or less normal tone.

"I was just explaining to these good fellows, officer," he said, "that they have made a mistake. They've brought this coffin to the wrong house."

The foreman scratched his head.

"Well, this 'ere's number one-twenty-five right enough, guv'nor."

"I know. But still, it's the wrong house. The Earl of Quorn does not live here : he lives at Quorn House, Lowndes Square."

Then, before he could say anything more, the most terrible thought attacked him. Was it possible ? Without giving any explanation, he stooped a second time and picked the coffin up in his arms. It was heavy—but not so heavy that it contained a body. . . . The relief made him quiver from head to foot.

But this grotesque business had to end.

"Take it back to the shop—and tell them that I will be along to talk to them in the morning. Officer, please see these men off : I want to go to bed. Take

them round to the nearest station and verify their statement. I'm not sure that this isn't a horrible practical joke."

When the foreman started to expostulate, the policeman cut him short.

"Nah then, less of it—wanderin' round this time o' night with corfins that don't belong——"

But for Tiger's quickness, the knife which the argumentative one had suddenly produced might have been buried in the officer's breast. As it was, with a blow that started at Standish's knee and ended flush on the man's jaw, the supposed foreman was sent reeling back. With a snort that an enraged bull might have made, the policeman jumped into the fray. He was a big man and evidently in the pink of condition ; but the other two did not wait to discover this truth : whilst one jumped into the driver's seat of the closed van, the other scrambled up beside him—and within an incredibly short space of time Tiger and his uniformed ally saw themselves staring after the vehicle that was being driven away at a rapid pace.

The policeman took off his helmet and wiped his brow.

"I ain't 'ad nothin' to drink tonight, sir—have you ?"

"Nothing to speak of, officer. But, since you mention it . . ."

In the "den", Tiger mixed the other a stiff whisky.

"Get that down ; it will do you good."

No time was lost in obeying the command. Then :

"Wot about that there corfin, sir ? They forgot that."

Tiger suddenly laughed—but there was little merriment in the sound. On the contrary, it was very grim.

"I think I'll keep it as a memento of an interesting occasion, officer. One never knows when a coffin may come in useful."

The policeman evidently thought that his host was suffering from the strain.

"I should get to bed, sir, if I was you," he commented, putting down his glass.

"Not a bad idea," returned Standish, who had no possible intention of following the advice.

A wide-eyed Benny Bannister straightened his back and sought information.

"What does it mean, guv'nor?" he asked. "I never 'eard of anything like it afore in me life."

Tiger's lips slipped into a grim smile.

"It means that I'm going to keep that coffin there until there's a body waiting to go into it—but the plate will be changed, Benny."

"I should think so, guv'nor. When I looked at that . . ."

The old professional footballer was unable to continue.

"I suppose," he said, "nothin' 'as 'appened to your father, guv'nor?" he went on later in a shaky voice.

"That's been the trouble at the back of my mind for the past half an hour. I'm going to ring through to the Earl's hotel at Cannes and get what information is possible. But you needn't wait; get off to bed."

"Not likely, guv'nor," was the disobedient answer. "I'm going to 'ang around, and see if any of those blighters come back, an' if they do . . ."

In that moment Benny bore an astonishing resemblance to a human bulldog.

The Earl of Quorn, sitting in his wheel-chair in the grounds of the Beau-site Hotel, Cannes, and feeling the sun on his face, thought that life was good. It was a pleasant morning, even for the Riviera, and he told himself he was well content.

To the left a number of tennis players were practising for the forthcoming tournament due to start in a couple of days' time. Prominent amongst the small group of notable players was Miss Phyllis Bendix, who for several years past now had had quite a deal of newspaper space devoted to her prowess on the court, her physical beauty,

her various reported engagements and whatnot. She was now speaking in a voice that had become somewhat strident—due perhaps to the fact that, in spite of all the best efforts of her Press agent, she was still Miss Phyllis Bendix and not Mrs. Something-or-Other. The Earl, who knew his world, smiled a little at this reflection.

But soon his thoughts went winging away from his immediate surroundings and became centred many hundreds of miles away. What were Tiger and Sonia doing that morning? How he would have liked to have them with him there! Lovely girl, Sonia—and what a fine wife she had made for his boy! Yes, he wished they could have come with him. Of course, tied to this damned chair, he was a nuisance to youngsters who wanted action; but still, they could have gone off and left him; he would have been all right with Hargreaves and Manley.

Why hadn't they come? Sonia had wanted to, but Tiger had hung back. Why? Tiger had been a bit of a mystery at times, but he had not cared to probe. No doubt the boy had his reasons. Tiger wasn't the sort of fellow to put needless obstacles in the way of his wife's enjoyment. Ah, well, perhaps if he sent them a wire they'd change their minds. . . .

The sun went in behind the clouds and the air suddenly became chilly. At that moment the Earl found a disturbing thought finding lodgment in his mind. He supposed . . . But, of course, that was out of the question. But the thought, like a maggot in an apple, continued to gnaw: the reason Tiger had stayed behind in England must have been a very powerful one. Could it possibly have anything to do with that infamous scoundrel—what was his name? Ah, he'd got it—Rahusen. Had that fellow cropped up again? It was like Tiger to keep the news from him, assuming that this surmise was correct.

Lighting a cigarette, the Earl endeavoured to push the mental disturbance from him. He was being imaginative. Had Rahusen returned to England, surely Sonia would have passed the word on? But then, again, she

might not. Dear child, she possibly would have wanted to save him any worry or anxiety.

His chain of thought was broken by the sight of Hargreaves approaching. The butler had not changed one iota during his trip abroad ; he remained as solidly and unmistakably British as the Nelson Monument.

"Beg pardon, my lord, but Mr. Timothy is on the telephone."

Tiger ! And he had just been thinking about the rascal.

"How is he ?" he enquired anxiously. "Did he say ?"

"He said he was perfectly well, my lord, but wished to know your own state of health."

Smiling at the formality of the speech, the invalid began to work his wheel-chair, and quite quickly he was picking up, with a hand that slightly trembled, the telephone-receiver.

"Hullo, my boy ! This is nice of you."

"Not at all, sir," came back the unmistakable voice of his son. "I just fancied that I'd ring up to see how you're getting on. I should have done so last night, but . . ."

"Well, why didn't you ?"

There was the sound of a confused laugh at the other end.

"Thought it might disturb your beauty sleep. Hargreaves and Manley looking after you all right ?"

"Perfectly. How's Sonia ?"

"Oh, she's fine—sends her love and all that sort of thing, you know. . . . She's out at the moment or I'd get her to speak herself."

"That's all right. Give her my love in return and say that I wish she was—that you both were, as a matter of fact—here with me. Can't you come over, my boy ?"

There was a pause.

"There's nothing I'd like more, and perhaps I may a little later."

"Well, think about it."

"I will, sir. You're sure you're all right?"

"Dammit, of course I'm all right. What's the matter with you this morning?"

"Put it down to filial affection, sir, and let it go at that. Well, good-bye, governor."

"Good-bye, my boy."

The line went dead.

For a few seconds after he had hung up, the Earl sat in an attitude of deep reflection. Something *had* been worrying Tiger; he could tell by the tone of his voice and the slight hesitancy of one or two of his replies. Was there anything wrong in town? No, of course not. He was being imaginative again. If he couldn't trust his own boy, whom could he trust? But, all the same, he thought he would write a private line to Sonia.

And with this purpose in mind he wheeled himself over to a table and commenced at once to write.

CHAPTER XXVII

Q.I ON THE JOB

THE man sitting so still, with his felt hat pulled down over his eyes as though to shield them from the fierce noonday sun, might have formed a subject for a study in boredom. That was to those who did not know David Torrance. To those who did not know that bright particular ornament of the Q.I branch of the British Intelligence, the sight would have been an extremely interesting one—for these would have known that Torrance, instead of being bored, was intensely interested.

As well he might be. It was the cocktail hour at the Mirimar Hotel, that luxury haunt of the wealthy cosmopolitan who still finds sufficient money to come to the French Riviera. The place was thronged, and the aperitifs particularly potent, for the management had imported, at great expense, a world-famous expert whose boast it was that any one of his six specialities could "make a corpse sit up on his hind legs and beg for mercy" !

These two facts combined furnished an explanation of the extraordinary conversation that Torrance was able to overhear at the next table. One of the two men seated there he recognized as Carl van Doran, the well-known travelling special correspondent of the *Wednesday Evening Post*, America's most famous weekly. Who van Doran's companion was Torrance could not quite decide, but imagined him to be a fellow journalist.

Van Doran, a skeleton of a man, with long, gangling legs, red hair, and a dry, clipped manner of speech,

heavily ironical, was speaking now. He had had three cocktails to Torrance's own knowledge, and his words were slightly blurred.

"Hell of a place. . . . I'll tell you, Rod, I've never seen such a show . . . *anything* . . . and on a plate . . . astonishing. . . . And who do you think I saw there last night? . . . Voltag."

The ordinary person engaged in David Torrance's exacting job might have betrayed some sign of astonishment at the mention of that name; but the agent of Q. I merely maintained his attitude of complete boredom. He had heard so many other astonishing things when apparently wrapped about by this same absorbing melancholy.

So, without moving a muscle of face or body, he continued to listen.

What he heard was not entirely novel. Van Doran, on his way round the pleasure haunts of the world, which he was writing up for his magazine, had discovered in Monte Carlo a new devil's playground that he styled as being "particularly plush". An enormous villa had been rented by a Greek *entrepreneur* of the underworld, and at La Villa Russe, according to the American journalist, a valued client could have all the gambling, all the vice, and all the criminal exoticism his taste demanded. This resort had only been in existence for a couple of months, according to van Doran, but already it was famous throughout Europe, numbering amongst its exclusive clientele many of the famous names in the various aristocracies. Even Royalty—of a sort—carefully incognito, of course, had been known to be present. . . . Certainly both British and French politicians of high rank could have been seen witnessing the orgies, whilst attachés and diplomats were, in van Doran's vivid phrase, as cheap as crooks on Broadway.

Not only was La Villa Russe supposed to be the South of France headquarters of the White Slave Traffic, but all kinds of perverted vice could be indulged there without let or hindrance.

At this point the journalist's companion put in a question.

"But the police?" he asked.

Van Doran made a contemptuous gesture with his long fingers.

"The police? Say, you poor sap, where do you think the police would get off, even if they did try to kick up a fuss? Why, half the crowned heads of Europe—those that are left—are members of this outfit."

"I see," commented the other. "Well, you've said a mouthful—and this very night, Van, you're going to take me there, or I swear to God I'll never speak to you again. This layout is something worth writing home about, I should imagine."

"You've said it," was the answer. "But here's a tip: don't go shooting your face off about what you see there—powerful interests are concerned, understand, and you don't want to get a bullet in your head after leaving the Casino one dark night."

"I certainly don't. Are they particular whom they let in?"

"I'll say they are—but I've got the password." He lowered his voice considerably, but the intently listening Torrance was still able to catch the few words that followed. "What you've got to say when you go up to the entrance is this: 'The Grand Duke has sent me.'"

"Is that the password?"

"That'll get you in. The Commissioner will treat you as though you were the whole Chamber of Deputies rolled into one when he hears that spied into his ear."

"Tonight, then, Van?"—to the latter as he rose to go.

"Oh, I don't know. . . . I was there last night, and what I saw fairly put me off my food."

"Don't be a crab, Van. Loosen up."

The other relented.

"All right; see you here at nine and we'll go over in the car."

The two shook hands and parted.

Meanwhile, Torrance sat on. What he had just heard was vastly interesting—and might be useful.

This Voltag person was the very man he had been shadowing in London before being shunted on to this fresh job of guarding the Earl of Quorn during his stay on the Continent. He had resented being given this fresh commission, but Sir Harker Bellamy, his superior, had been adamant.

"If you did but know it, my boy," The Mole had said, "I wouldn't trust this work to anyone else in the Department—see to it that you don't let me down."

That was all very well, but to be forced to act as a nursemaid to an elderly invalid—good sportsman as Quorn was, of course—had proved mighty irritating. Naturally, he had done all that was possible; but now that in a most amazing fashion the Voltag "end" had cropped up again—why, he wasn't going to lose sight of it!

Emil Voltag at this time was one of the most publicly criticized figures in Europe. In the recently established Republic of Kronstadt he acted as Chancellor and right-hand man generally to the new Dictator, Kuhnreich. Together these two had not only written history but convulsed their country. Their aim, it was freely stated, not merely in Caronia, their lifelong enemy and next neighbour, but throughout the world, was WAR, and they would not scruple to use any means to further this ambition.

It was Sir Harker Bellamy's principal resident agent in Kronstadt who had sent the first news of Voltag's special activities directed against England. Then the man had actually the audacity to come to London himself. What his object was no one could say with any particularity—but a whole lot was thought.

It had been Torrance's own special mission to keep him shadowed, but the man had proved so elusive and had been so carefully piloted by members of his body-guard that little of any real value had been gained during this scrutiny.

It was disappointing—especially as he had been shifted from the job whilst Voltag was still in London.

But now . . . ? Well, who could tell ? Voltag was known throughout Europe as a degenerate and a voluptuary : if one quarter of the stories told about the man were true, he was something approaching a sexual maniac.

And now he had come, like the rest of his kind, to this house of abomination at Monte Carlo ! Well, tonight he would take his chance. At midnight, when, according to the American journalist, the debauchery was at its height, he, David Torrance, of Q.1, British Intelligence, would be on hand—that was if the password, "The Grand Duke has sent me", proved as magical as Carl van Doran had intimated.

CHAPTER XXVIII

BAD NEWS FROM ABROAD

TIGER turned away from the telephone with a deep sigh of relief. The old boy was all right! His fears had proved to be absurd. And yet—oh, to the deuce with these vapours! He was behaving like an hysterical school-kid instead of a grown man.

He had just finished filling a pipe when Sonia came into the den.

"Did I hear you speaking to someone, old man?"

"Yes—the governor."

"The Earl?"

Tiger found it necessary to prevaricate.

"Oh, I just thought I'd ring him up—a sudden impulse, you know. He sent his love to you, and lots of kisses."

"How is he?"

"Very fit; enjoying himself no end, apparently."

Sonia came closer.

"Tiger, couldn't we manage to go down to him, if only for a few days?"

"I hate to deny you anything, sweetkins, but . . ."

"But—what?"

"Well, I think I'd better stay on in town for a little while longer. As a matter of fact"—inventing—"Bellamy was saying something about giving me a job to do."

His wife's face flushed.

"Then you're jolly well not going to do it," she declared with unexpected determination. "I know we owe a tremendous lot to The Mole, and I hope I should be the

last to try to deny it—but you're a married man now, Tiger—and that's that. Kiss me!"

Having obliged, and feeling, after the process, "as though harps were playing 'The Blue Danube' somewhere inside me", as he put it, Tiger applied the closure to this somewhat embarrassing talk by lighting his pipe.

"Going to stretch the old legs for a bit," he stated. "Do you think, my dear, that Job, apart altogether from his boils and what not, suffered with his knees?"

"Why?" she asked, laughing.

"Because just at this particular moment I feel I could give Old Man Job about ninety-nine yards' start in the hundred yards self-commiseration stakes, and beat him hollow. Fact is, I miss my football. . . . Ah, well, see you later, sweet child."

Giving violent contradiction to his plaint by whistling cheerfully, he left the room.

It was just as he had expected.

The gentleman at Langham's, in Wigmore Street, who had seen to so many funerals that he bore a close resemblance to a well-preserved corpse himself, pursed his lips like the film actor Edward Everett Horton, and tut-tutted most impressively.

"Langham's would not think of conducting their business in such a manner, sir," he pom-pommed impressively. "To send out a coffin at such an hour, and in a van! Tch! Tch!"

Tiger used a little soothing oil.

"I was practically certain in my own mind that you knew nothing about it, but, as you can imagine, I felt it necessary to call in to make absolutely certain."

"Quite, sir—oh, quite. But Langham's . . ." There was much more, but Standish did not stop to listen to it.

It was just as Tiger had finished dressing for dinner that Pringle informed him Sir Harker Bellamy was on the 'phone.

"Did he say what it was about—no, of course, he wouldn't," he amended quickly. "All right, Pringle ;

I'll be down directly. Tell Sir Harker that I won't keep him more than a minute."

Looking radiantly beautiful, Sonia entered the dressing-room and stood gazing at her husband's broad back. Tiger was giving a final touch to his tie.

"Let me see, old man."

He turned quickly.

"Sonia, darling, you mustn't come in like that."

"And why not?" There was a gay challenge in her voice.

"Because . . ." Then he couldn't find the words. He daren't tell her that many of the fears of the morning had returned with that message from the Chief of Q.I.

"What did Pringle want?"

"Someone on the 'phone."

"That's very vague. The more you put me off, old man, the more inquisitive I shall become. Who was it?"

He had to tell her.

"Sir Harker."

"What does he want?"

"Heaven only knows."

At the risk of leaving some powder on his lapel, she snuggled up to him, resting her head on his chest.

"You're not going to take on that job—I shall tell him so myself if necessary. Let me go down."

"My dear, there's no need for you to get the wind up. There!"—kissing her. "I'll be back in a second."

But when he caught the first note of The Mole's voice, he knew that something very grave had happened.

"I want to see you at once, Standish—it's vitally important. And please don't tell your wife."

"Why not?"

"Because, you fool, she might get alarmed. Now, shall I come round to you or will you drive to Whitehall?"

"But, damn it, man, what is it?"

"I don't want to tell you over the telephone."

"I was just sitting down to dinner."

"Well," was the grim report, "what I've got to tell

you would spoil your appetite in any case. I shall expect you here in twenty minutes."

Tiger was still frowning when Sonia, wide-eyed and anxious-faced, walked into the room. He stopped through sheer decency.

"What is it, old man?"

"Oh, nothing," he lied, "but I've got to get down to Whitehall at once."

"That job? Tiger, you promised!"

"My dear, don't worry me now."

Unable to meet her gaze, he brushed past her. There was nothing else for him to do. Had he stayed, she could have told from his expression that tragedy was in the air.

He was still furious when, twenty minutes later, he stepped into Sir Harker Bellamy's private room and flung a question at the little grave-faced man sitting in the swivel chair.

"Now, what the hell is it?"

The Mole held up a hand.

"Don't lose your temper, my boy; you will want all your self-control in a minute. In the meanwhile, sit down. And believe me when I say that I am feeling this thing pretty badly myself."

He knew Bellamy too well to hurl at his head any further reproaches. This was serious.

The Mole wasted no time.

"Torrance has just rung me up from Cannes," he started.

"Torrance? What's he doing in Cannes?"

The reply came swiftly.

"Watching your father. Do you think that I was going to allow anything to happen to that dear old chap—but, damn it, it has happened!"

"WHAT?"

"Sit down. I'll tell you everything I know. But for God's sake control yourself. This thing has got to be faced, and neither of us will gain anything by letting his nerves get out of control."

"I must smoke—give me a cigarette. Thanks"—as the box was pushed over. "And now get on with the yarn. I promise not to interrupt."

Bellamy plunged into his tale.

"I took Torrance off a very important job in London because I felt it was up to me that nothing should happen to the Earl. I hadn't forgotten, you see, that Rahusen had made a certain boast—and I have too much affection for your father . . ." The speaker stopped for a moment, his always grim jaw becoming grimmer, and then proceeded in a somewhat quicker voice. "The reason I didn't tell you about Torrance acting as a kind of watchdog over your father was because I felt that in all probability—we weren't hitting it off too well at the time, remember—you would tell me to mind my own damned business. But now for the facts: Torrance has rung up to say that your father has disappeared."

"When did it happen?" Tiger had flung his cigarette away only a quarter smoked, and his hands were clutching the sides of his chair.

"About half past five today. Apparently the Earl had asked Manley to take him up to La Californie, as he wanted to watch the sunset over the old town."

"Yes—he often talked about the Esterel sunset. Go on."

"They were due back shortly after six. Your father dined early in his suite at the Beau-site Hotel—never later than seven-fifteen—because he liked to put in a good evening's reading."

"I know all that."

"Sorry," apologized The Mole, "but every detail is of some value. However, I won't burden you with too much data, but will come straight to the point. When your father did not return at the appointed time, Hargreaves got worried. He was aware of Torrance's real identity, and when Torrance called at the hotel to get his usual report from the butler, Hargreaves gave him his confidence. A search was at once made and——"

Tiger interrupted by standing up.

"The governor isn't dead—don't tell me that," he said in a frightening voice.

"Sit down, my boy. No, so far as I know he's still alive. But"—the speaker put a hand up to his forehead as though he were suffering pain—"Manley's dead—his body was found in some bushes near the convent at La Californie. . . . Try to take it on the chin, my boy."

"Blast you, I *am* trying. Is that all you know?"

"All at present. Torrance is doing everything he can. He is in touch with the Cannes police, and . . ."

But he was speaking to an empty room: Standish, with a tremendous oath, had shot past, banging the door behind him.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE EARL FACES THE TRUTH

"BEAUCLERC MANSIONS, Baker Street !"

Tiger snapped the order to the first taxi-driver who was available. The information just given him by Sir Harker Bellamy was maddening. In the absence of Rahusen himself, he intended to get his hands on the neck of that swine Aubrey Hamme, and squeeze it until the fellow came through with some part, at least, of the truth. If Hamme were in Rahusen's confidence, as must be the case, he would know something of what had happened to the Earl of Quorn. If he didn't know, he'd hit daylight into the hound all the same. . . .

Telling the driver to wait, Standish raced up the steps of the entrance to the palatial block of luxury flats and glared at the expensively uniformed hall-porter.

"Mr. Hamme," he snapped—"quickly."

The man looked at him in surprise.

"I'm sorry, sir," he replied, "but Mr. Hamme has left. He gave up his flat over a week ago."

"Where's he gone?" In his anxiety he caught hold of the man's shoulder. The porter tried to wriggle himself free.

"I beg your pardon, sir !"

"Never mind about that—I want to know where this fellow Hamme has gone. You've probably had some instructions to redirect his letters. *Where has he gone ?*"

By this time the porter's face had developed a greenish

tinge. He evidently considered that he was being confronted by a madman.

"If you will kindly release me, sir——"

Tiger took his hand away and followed the porter into his cubby-hole.

"This is the address Mr. Hamme left when he locked up his flat." The speaker took a piece of paper from a ledger-like book and passed it to the enquirer. Tiger read an address in Paris and cursed aloud ; by the time he got across the Channel his father might be dead—was dead now, perhaps. . . .

"You don't know anything more than this?"

"Nothing, sir. Mr. Hamme was never very communicative when he was here. Not like some gentlemen . . ."

But Standish had not waited to hear any more. By this time he was out in the hall again en route for the entrance.

Whilst the taxi-driver waited impassively for further directions, Tiger stood looking up and down Baker Street. What should he tell Sonia? That was the problem. He'd have to go to Cannes, of course, now that the London end seemed useless.

He was still brooding when a short, dapper figure approached.

"I thought you'd be here, my boy," said a grim but not unkindly voice.

Turning round, he saw Bellamy. Tiger nodded.

"I meant to get hold of that swine Hamme and squeeze the truth out of him, but he's gone. The porter gave me some address in Paris—but that may be a blind."

"Probably is," commented the older man.

"I shall have to get over to Cannes. I can't rest here. The devil of it is, I was just thinking what excuse I could give my wife. She'll know that something serious is the matter."

"Come back to the office again—just for a few minutes," suggested Bellamy. "And as for going to Cannes, I think it would be merely waste of time. I'll tell you why," he went on quickly, as Standish turned

angrily to him : "Torrance is a good man, as you know ; he will do everything that is possible, and it may be that there is an 'end' in London, after all. You wouldn't want to miss connecting with it if that were so ?"

"I would not."

"Very well, then, my boy : listen to me for this once. How do we know that this business may not be merely a trap to try to get you out of England ? Murder is much more easily accomplished in France than here, as I need scarcely tell you. Torrance is on the spot ; I have cabled him the most minute and definite instructions ; he is in touch, I understand, with Laroche, the famous private detective who works independently of the French police—and we may be hearing some good news at any moment now."

Tiger allowed himself to be persuaded. Even if he went by air, it would take several hours for him to get on the spot ; and he had Sonia to think of. Perhaps, as Bellamy had suggested, this was merely a snare set to take him away from his wife's side. . . .

He got into the taxicab and Bellamy stepped after him.

At that moment, in a small, commonplace villa lying three miles to the back of Nice, the Earl of Quorn contemplated the future with as much equanimity of mind as he could bring to bear upon the situation.

A man with less philosophy in his soul and less courage in his heart would have been profoundly dispirited ; for, look which way he might, the Earl was unable to espy any daylight. He was a prisoner now—and heaven only knew what his captors intended to do with him in the future.

Not that so far he had been treated with any unnecessary cruelty. In fact, there was some ironic comedy attaching itself to one aspect of the situation: the man sitting on a hard kitchen chair in a corner of the only partially furnished bedroom, who was acting as his gaoler, had gone out of his way to say that some years previously he had

had experience as a male nurse and so, "You won't want for any comfort". But the words had been accompanied by such an evil leer that the tidings had scarcely been inspiring.

The Earl's mind went back to that moment of disaster, 5.30 p.m. on the previous day. He had got Manley—a very capable deputy chauffeur—to drive him up to La Californie in order that he might watch the sunset over the Esterels. A passionate lover of nature, in no part of the world had he seen such amazing scenic effects in the western sky as when staying at Cannes, and once or twice every week he permitted himself this pleasure.

Nothing untoward had happened, until he saw a number of men steal out of the undergrowth that crowned the rocks on the right-hand side of the road and approach the car in what seemed to him a menacing manner. The same thought must have occurred to Manley, for his valet-chauffeur turned his head enquiringly.

But before Manley could put in his clutch the men had reached the car. Without any preamble whatever, one of them covered the driver with a revolver, whilst another started to hustle him from his seat. Manley put up a good show, but the struggle was too one-sided for it to have but one conclusion, and, with an agony of mind that he knew he would never forget, the Earl watched his faithful servant being battered into unconsciousness by these despicable ruffians.

He was hoping all the time, of course, that another car would pass; but the road, by a queer turn of fate, remained deserted. He did start to shout for help, but the whole thing was over in what seemed a few seconds—and, leaving Manley's body lying very still on the side of the precipice, screened by a thick growth of bushes from the view of any passer-by, one of the miscreants got into the driver's seat and the car sped away.

He must have lost consciousness himself after that, for he could not remember anything intervening between

his being kidnapped and waking up in this cold, ugly, barely furnished bedroom. What length of time had elapsed he could not tell—but he supposed it must have been several hours.

"How is it now, Grandpa?" queried a voice, and, looking across, he saw his gaoler leering at him once again. Really, a most offensive fellow—but for the time being at least he supposed he had to put up with him. Incapacitated as he was, he could not go to the man; so he beckoned the other to the side of the bed.

"Where is this place?"

"Ah, you'd like to know that, I dare say!"

"I'll make it worth your while if you'll tell me." He hated the thought of bribing such a creature, but when he remembered the anguish that Tiger and Sonia would be suffering directly the news reached them—as by this time it must have done—the rigid orthodoxy of his ordinary life did not seem to matter.

"How much will you give me?"

He said the first sum that came into his mind.

"A hundred pounds."

"That's all very well, but how can I get it?"

"Take me away from here, see that I get safely back to the Beau-site Hotel at Cannes, and I'll promise you two hundred pounds. I am the Earl of Quorn."

"I heard as 'ow you was some big nob," returned the crook, "but——" He was not allowed to say any more, for, without any warning, the door opened and a man stepped into the room. At the sight of him the gaoler returned precipitately to his seat in the corner.

Hans de Boo looked down at his prisoner.

"I'm sorry to have caused you so much inconvenience, my lord," he stated, "but circumstances are sometimes stronger than individual wishes. I regret also that this present accommodation is so poor, but quite soon now preparations will be made to take you back to England."

England! But all hope soon died when he looked into the venomous eyes of the man above him.

Still, he had to learn as much of the truth as possible.

"I suppose you are Rahusen?" he asked.

The other burst into a violent fit of laughter.

"What makes you think I am Rahusen—and who is Rahusen, anyway?"

The Earl could not resist a gibe.

"When I return to England I will ask my son—he will know."

"Your son?" The words were spat. "If you value your life, old man, never mention your son to me again!" With that the speaker turned and hurriedly left the room.

CHAPTER XXX

AT THE VILLA RUSSE

THIS night's particular orgy was in full swing at the Villa Russe. Pirelli, the Levantine Greek, who catered for the queer tastes of the great number of wealthy degenerates who formed the majority of his clientele, smiled as he exchanged greetings with this party and that.

In the vast underground chamber from which small rooms like—and yet so unlike!—monastic cells led off, the popping of champagne-corks was accompanied by shrill, hysterical screams from women and the rapt, concentrated stare of men.

As he sipped his wine, Hans de Boo turned to his companion.

"I wonder if ancient Rome saw anything worse than this?"

"Eh?"

The glazed eyes of Emil Voltag showed no comprehension; their owner was too absorbed by the amazing spectacle which Pirelli had arranged as the special "high-light".

But when the "show" was over he shook himself like a man who comes out of a drugged sleep, and enquired wearily:

"What was that you said?"

The man sitting on the other side of the small table smiled.

"It doesn't matter; it was not of any importance. Ah, here's the master of ceremonies. He looks as though he would like to speak to you."

Voltag's muddled eyes took on a new interest as the Levantine approached. Pirelli was a smooth-mannered, suave-tongued scoundrel, fastidiously neat in his person, and looking, at first glance, entirely insignificant. But this former keeper of brothels in Athens and Constantinople was a personality in his own evil sphere. He possessed, for instance, the most comprehensive knowledge of the European underworld of any man living; he was incredibly cruel, vauntingly ambitious, sickeningly servile (when it served his purpose), and, with the means he had at his disposal, not to mention the protection his distinguished patrons afforded him, he was an exceedingly dangerous enemy to make. Stories could have been told of men with bullet-wounds in their heads being left to rot in the catacombs that ran for miles away from the Villa Russe.

In the early fifties, he looked, with his small, neat, slim figure, and dark hair brushed back over his forehead after a plentiful oiling, not more than forty.

As he approached the Kronstadtian and his companion he bowed low.

"I trust you are not disappointed, Herr Voltag?" he enquired in a voice so curiously treble it might have belonged to a schoolboy. Many people had been deceived by that voice into thinking that its owner could be brushed aside as not being worth consideration. Not a few had paid for the mistake with their lives.

Voltag rose, shook hands with the speaker, and held out his cigar-case—a massive affair of solid gold.

"You have excelled yourself, my dear Pirelli," he replied with the utmost goodwill. "But permit me to introduce my good friend, Mynheer Hans de Boo. He tells me there is nothing like this to be seen at Amsterdam."

The *entrepreneur* affected pleasure.

"I am fortunate in receiving such praise," he said before accepting the cigar and passing on.

Voltag laughed—a little uneasily.

"I can't say that I am unduly sensitive," he remarked,

"but I never meet that fellow without having the impression that he will disappear in flames one night. But, by the way—"changing the subject abruptly—"you haven't told me in any detail yet why you are here in the South of France."

Hans de Boo looked at the glowing end of his cigar.

"I had some private affairs to see to."

Voltag eyed him intently.

"You will be returning to England?"

"Almost immediately."

Voltag looked round.

"You haven't forgotten Sir Harker Bellamy?" he asked.

"He is next on the list," was the answer. After that the conversation between the two took a highly confidential turn.

"Well," stated Hans de Boo after twenty minutes or so, "I must be going; I've had sufficient dissipation for one evening."

At that point a man in what at the beginning of the evening was possibly immaculate dress staggered past on his way to the entrance. He was as drunk as an owl, and was doing his best to smoke the lighted end of his cigar.

He waved an unsteady hand as he stumbled forward. De Boo was instantly suspicious.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"A friend of van Doran, the American journalist—I was introduced to him earlier on. What are you frightened of?"

"Nothing—you should know that. But I thought there was something familiar about that fellow; no doubt I was mistaken."

"You must have been. . . . Well, if you're going, good night. You can write to me at the usual place."

"You won't be returning to London?"

Voltag grimaced.

"No—I'm afraid I have outworn my welcome. . . . You won't forget Bellamy?"

"I won't forget," were his companion's parting words.

Laroche, the famous French private detective, gesticulated with his one free hand.

"I regret I have no better news, *mon ami*," he said, "but with patience, who knows? It was daring, this *coup*, but I have so often found that the daring ones smash their heads against the wall. So . . ."

David Torrance nodded. He was in evening dress—somewhat soiled evening dress.

"Now I'm going to tell you something," he said, "or, rather"—breaking off—"I'm going to ask you a question: why isn't the Villa Russe cleaned up?"

Laroche shrugged his shoulders in the expressive manner only possible to the Frenchman.

"You should direct that question to M. le President of the Republic," he replied cryptically. "Why do you ask?"

But now it was David Torrance's turn to be cryptical.

"I'll tell you another time," he said.

CHAPTER XXXI

A VISIT TO SOHO

AUBREY HAMME had not left London ; consequently the information given to Tiger Standish by the hall porter at Beauclerc Mansions had been incorrect. The chief lieutenant of Rahusen had certainly left a Paris address for any letters to be redirected, but the manœuvre had been merely a blind to put off possible inquirers.

Ye Merrie Hamme-bone, these days, was not a very good-tempered individual. The memory of the last interview he had had with his chief rankled. Rahusen had changed, not only in facial form and name but in temperament. When they had first come together there had been a very good working understanding between them ; but since Rahusen (*alias* Hans de Boo) had taken up with foreign politics and had thus swum into the orbit of Emile Voltag, his whole character had undergone a startling metamorphosis. Things, indeed, were not what they used to be. Whilst the two of them had been engaged solely in running various branches of lucrative crime, they had scarcely exchanged a cross word ; but now that Rahusen had become a murder specialist, it was different—very different.

During the time that Rahusen had been abroad, something had happened to him. Exactly what it was, he, Aubrey Hamme, had never been able to discover ; but since taking up with Voltag—and this appeared to be the turning-point in his life—Rahusen had become an extremely difficult taskmaster. The man had relied on

him before, but now he appeared to hold him in scathing contempt.

Which was not so good. Aubrey Hamme had an excellent opinion of himself, and his outraged pride was now festering like a sore thumb. He longed to show his independence and was even at this moment considering a method by which this could be accomplished. He had many advantages, he adjudged, over Rahusen: he was better educated, had better manners, and was altogether more a man of the world. It was Rahusen's ruthlessness and cunning brain that had brought him to the forefront of modern criminals. If only he let slip a word to the police . . . But, of course, that was not to be considered—at least, not yet. But, all the same, he allowed his mind to dwell fondly on the excitement which would prevail at Scotland Yard if and when he threw his bomb-shell. Right from the time of Jack the Ripper to now, there had been no murderer that the Metropolitan Police were so eager to capture as the killer whose three sensational exploits had convulsed not only England but the whole world.

Lighting a cigar, Hamme now looked round the mean room. This was another grievance: on one pretext and another Rahusen had cut down his salary until he had been forced to leave—at least temporarily—his sumptuous flat in Beaucherc Mansions, and was now, if you please, living a damnably uncomfortable existence in a Bloomsbury bed-sitting-room!

The one decent cigar he had left burned slowly to a close. Surrounded by the aromatic smoke, Hamme saw a vision—a vision that was intoxicating to the senses and entrancing to his sorely wounded pride. Another five minutes and he had made up his mind: he would go after Standish himself.

He knew that in doing so he would be disobeying, in the most flagrant fashion, his superior's wishes; like a gourmet keeping a favourite dish to the last, Rahusen was intent on allowing Standish to remain alive until he had completed his plans concerning both the

Earl of Quorn and Tiger's wife. The killing of Standish would be his last triumphant stroke before leaving England for good.

A man nursing a sense of outraged vanity is likely to become dangerous, and Hamme had been brooding now for over two hours. Flinging away the stump of his cigar, he came to an irrevocable decision : he would get Standish himself—and he would get him that night. Not by himself—oh, dear, no ; there was too much risk. But . . .

And then, picking up the copy of the evening paper that the slatternly maid had placed on the table half an hour before, he began to think of ways and means.

A heading caught his eye :

MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF FAMOUS PEER

STILL NO NEWS OF THE EARL OF QUORN

At the moment of going to Press no further information has been received concerning the mysterious disappearance of the Earl of Quorn, who has been staying for some days past on the French Riviera.

As we stated yesterday, the Earl is believed to have been kidnapped by a gang of miscreants whilst motoring in La Californie district. A brutal attack was made on his valet-chauffeur at a spot overlooking a precipice, where the servant's dead body was discovered.

The local police are inclined to the belief that the Earl is possibly being held to ransom by a band of desperadoes who have been victimizing wealthy visitors in this way for some weeks past.

We understand that Scotland Yard is interesting itself actively in the outrage.

Hamme, after reading the short article a second time, rose quickly and put on hat and coat.

An hour later, after making a tour of various cheap cafés in the Soho districts, the former disgraced product of Eton found himself in a scabrous room beneath the rafters of a roof in Frith Street. Soho, the crime headquarters of London, contains many strange characters, but the man into whose face Hamme now looked occupied a unique position.

In the argot of the underworld, every prominent member of the criminal fraternity is known by a nickname, and "The Glider" lived up to his, for he was not merely thin in body but fluid of movement. He did not so much walk through life as glide through it. Although only in the early thirties, he was pallid of face and had the marks of dissipation and disease stamped unmistakably upon him. The devil had already marked him for his own, but The Glider, instead of being sorry, exalted in the fact. He was a human weed—and the right hand (with the knife which it held so often) could be bought by anyone willing to pay The Glider's price.

The two made a strange contrast—Hamme, burly of figure and dressed in a suit that had been fashioned by a West End craftsman; The Glider, lean and mean in aspect, wearing the slop clothes purchased only a week before at a ready-to-wear emporium not far from Covent Garden. But all kinds of people came to see The Glider in his attic beneath the Soho sky, and he paid little heed to the other's speech until the vital subject of money was mentioned.

Then he listened with both ears. . . .

"Now, you understand," concluded Hamme, after talking earnestly for at least ten minutes, "I take no responsibility—and you get the money only after the job is done."

The Glider nodded; he was always sparing of speech.

CHAPTER XXXII

EXIT THE GLIDER

TIGER's first thought, after Pringle had brought him the message, was to tell the butler to send the visitor to the devil. He had had enough of pressmen in all conscience. But the next moment he remembered that newspapers had their own special methods of gathering information—and perhaps the fellow might be bringing some news of his father which would prove valuable if handed on to the police.

"All right, Pringle ; say I'll see him," he stated.

"Very good, sir."

Standish had met many journalists in his time, but the specimen who entered now was not exactly a flattering addition to the craft. He was pallid of face, looked undernourished, and was altogether a very weedy type.

"Mr. Standish, I believe ?" he said in a cracked voice.

"Correct. I understand you're from the *Evening Miracle* ? Your editor telephoned just now."

The man nodded. Tiger, interested, told him to sit down.

"You're just in time for a cup of tea," he announced—"if tea is in your line ?"

"Thanks," said the other briefly ; "I should like a cup of tea."

Following Pringle, who entered at that moment with the tea-tray, came Richard the Lion, the half-Persian. Unless he had more pressing business afoot—such as chasing Black, the next-door feline, out of his garden—Richard made it an invariable rule to wait

until either Pringle or one of the maids carried in the tea and then immediately followed. The fascinating and rare trick the half-Persian cat had of sitting up and begging for his afternoon drink ensured him a supply of milk with just a colouring of tea, not to mention what tit-bits, such as fish-paste sandwiches, were going.

But Dick liked to have his tea with people he knew. He was not partial to strangers, and had never been from his kittenhood. Now, as he smelt this stranger, he evidenced a strong dislike of the man by a vigorous wagging of his tail.

"What's the matter, old boy?" asked Standish, recognizing the signs.

The cat came to him and rubbed his magnificent head against his master's leg.

"Miaow!" he said.

"That's all right, old chap. Here, sit up."

But even when his beloved master started pouring milk and tea into the slop-basin which always served as the cat's "cup", Richard would not abandon his flag-waving. He drank his tea, it is true, but every now and then he would look up and eye the visitor with mingled distrust and disdain.

"Have some of these sandwiches?" suggested Standish, handing over the plate.

The representative of the *Evening Miracle* put out a claw-like left hand.

"Thanks," he said, just as briefly as before.

"Now, what is it you want to see me about?" Tiger, not liking the look of the fellow, had maintained a very keen scrutiny of him from the moment of entry.

"We have had some good news at the office about your father, Mr. Standish."

"Well, what is it?"

"Our local representative telephoned this afternoon to say that——"

The flow of rusty-sounding words stopped. A third party had taken a hand—or, rather, a claw—in the conversation: Richard the Lion, animated by some feeling

peculiar to his shrewd animal brain, had apparently resented this obnoxious stranger eating his master's food, and had endeavoured to claw the sandwich out of the pressman's hand.

The result was chaotic—and sensational. The sudden shock caused the visitor to leap up—and as he did so Tiger, with staring eyes, saw a knife fall from his sleeve on to the carpet.

"Thanks, old chap," he said to Dick—and leapt.

But the other lived up to his underworld nickname : he glided away like a wraith. Something solid struck Standish in the face : it was the man's foot, delivered *savate*-fashion in the manner of the Paris apache. The pain was agonizing for a moment, and before he could recover himself the other had taken a headlong plunge through the window at the far end of the room and was endeavouring to get to safety through the garden.

With the blood streaming down his face, Tiger started in pursuit. If he once got his hands on the swine, he'd break every bone in his body. It was no use trying to follow him through the garden : he must endeavour to cut him off by going through the front door. But when he turned the corner into Grosvenor Place he found that he was too late : forty yards or so ahead of him he saw the man being dragged into a car head first ; the car then immediately made off.

Tiger, cursing his luck, looked round, and in that moment a voice he recognized shouted :

"Get in ! Get in !"

Turning, Standish saw, to his amazement, Sir Harold Lellant leaning over the side of a huge black roadster that looked capable of doing ninety miles an hour.

"*Police car*," cried Lellant. "*Get in !*"

Tiger did not waste any time in asking questions ; the essential facts sufficed : in the distance was a car carrying several of his enemies—including a man who had come to his house with the unmistakable purpose of knifing him—and here was a means of trying to overtake it. That was enough.

He barged through the held-open door and fell with a thud on to the lap of a couple of men.

"So——" The rest of the apology was cut off, for the car immediately shot forward with a velocity that spoke of terrific engine power.

"She'll do ninety—easily," remarked a voice. "Do you mind getting off my stomach?"

Standish, as he raised himself, laughed. It was no joke to have fourteen stone flung at you.

"Sorry, you blokes," he said. "There wasn't much time, was there?"

"Not a lot," conceded the man now engaged in tenderly caressing his abdomen.

His companion grinned.

"He'll be grouching about his indigestion for weeks to come," he said. . . . "Whoops, dearie!"—as the car took a corner on what seemed the rim of one wheel and started to shoot in and out of the traffic like a demented creature.

Tiger looked round. The car was a large saloon—shabby but efficient-looking. The two men and himself occupied the back seat. It was a tight squeeze. Next to the driver, with his eyes glued ahead, was Sir Harold Lellant. The latter did not turn.

"Flying Squad," vouchsafed the man on his left.

The laconic statement was sufficient; it explained a lot. This car with the tremendous speed was one of the express fleet used by the Special Branch of Scotland Yard detectives in tracking down dangerous criminals.

"Bit of luck you happened to be outside my place just now."

The detective nodded.

"We were after The Glider ourselves."

At the speed at which the car was travelling it was difficult to catch words plainly without shouting, and so before he replied Tiger put his mouth close to the other's right ear.

"Who's The Glider?" he enquired.

The detective looked over Standish's shoulder at his mate.

"You tell him, Jack," he roared.

The second Flying Squad man stopped massaging his abdominal wall.

"He's the best 'thief' in London with a knife—a professional killer. He'd cut his own mother's throat if he was paid enough."

"Thanks—that explains a lot."

Tiger did not say anything more, but contented himself with leaning as far back as was possible in the limited amount of space available—both the detectives were big muscular fellows.

The gentleman known so picturesquely as The Glider—this knight of the knife whose services as an assassin were open to the highest bidder—had been sent by Rahusen, of course. It had been a clever move to get the killer to pose as a representative of the *Evening Miracle*, and once again he had to thank Richard the Lion for preventing a whole heap of trouble. Not that this present affair could be compared with the incident of the hat-box: he would have rumbled this fellow—had already begun to rumble him when the denouement had come so suddenly.

"Do you mind if we change places?" he asked the detective sitting on his left.

The other looked at him with a certain suspicion.

"What's the idea?"

"I'll tell you later on."

"Oh, all right—only mind that door: the handle was a bit loose this morning."

"So much the better."

"So much the better, eh? Well, if you fell out with us going at this speed there'd be a nasty mess for someone to clear up, let me tell you."

Before Tiger could pass any comment on this blunt statement Sir Harold Lellant had swung round in his seat.

"We're gaining on them," he announced.

"Good!" shouted back Standish. "Slow up just

a bit when we draw alongside, will you, because I want to clamber aboard?"

"They'll probably be armed?"

"Don't let that worry you. I've made a bet with my friend here"—indicating the detective with whom he had just changed seats—"that I'll be pulling The Glider to pieces within ten minutes, and I should hate to lose my money."

"Don't be a fool, Standish," came the injunction.

"I've stopped being that, Lellant," was the grim reply.

Looking back through the window, Tiger noticed they had reached the back streets of some suburb—could it be Shepherd's Bush?—and that the Flying Squad car was now travelling at a clip that would have gained appreciative notice on the Brooklands track.

Thanks to some marvellous driving on the part of the genius at the wheel, it was gaining on the enemy—the fugitives were being rapidly overhauled.

A wild tumult commenced to beat in Standish's heart. Soon . . .

"Here, what's the idea?"

Tiger paid no heed. He had his fingers on the handle. As the car drew alongside, he thrust the door open, and, balancing himself for just a moment—*leapt*!

An elderly man, wearing spectacles, was regarding him with a puzzled expression.

"Why you weren't killed . . ." he started to say, and then his patient sat up. Tiger, beyond a loud buzzing in his head, felt comparatively O.K.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The elderly man frowned.

"My name is McAllister, and I happen to be a doctor—not the keeper of a lunatic asylum," he replied with a certain acerbity of tone, "although why my house should be turned into a police casualty station I do not know. Perhaps you would like to see your friend now?"

The speaker did not wait for an answer, but left the

room. Within a minute he returned, leading by the arm a man whose face was so heavily bandaged that Standish was only able to recognize the Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard by the cut of his trousers.

"Hullo, Lellant!" he grinned. "What's happened to the old dial?" And then, memory returning: "Did we have a smash or something?"

A muffled voice, that sounded especially ludicrous in the circumstances, answered him.

"Oh no, nothing very important happened," replied Lellant sarcastically. "One of the crooks we were chasing merely threw a tear-gas bomb in front of the Flying Squad car, thus blinding not only the driver but myself, and after that . . . But, yes, I do seem to remember something about a smash: we went clean through a garden wall and into a perfectly respectable suburban drawing-room."

"My hat!" ejaculated Standish. "Any lives lost?"

"Yes."

"You don't say! Not one of the fellows sitting with me on the back seat?"

The heavily-bandaged Assistant Commissioner shook his head.

"No—but you got your pigeon all right. When you were picked up your hands were still clasped round The Glider's neck—and he was very dead."

"What happened to the rest?"

"They got away—damn it! But the whole neighbourhood turned out to watch. They seemed to think we were a film company doing the best parts of a shocker."

"Well," commented Tiger, "we seem to have saved something from the wreck."

"What are you jawing about?"

"I was just thinking of our mutual friend The Glider," was the response. "Give me a cigarette, will you?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

A NIGHT JOURNEY

VERY discreetly, as though it knew it had secret tidings to impart, the telephone rang. Aubrey Hamme impatiently snatched off the receiver and placed it to his ear.

"Yes?"

A thin croak of a voice spoke.

"I'm 'phoning for The Glider," it stated.

"Well—go on, what is it?"

"'E didn't pull it off, guv'nor. Somethin' happened—somethin' bad."

"What do you mean?"

"It was like this: 'E went in, with us waiting round the corner in the car as arranged. Then suddenly 'e 'ops over the garden wall, with that big feller—you know who—after him. We pulls him into the car and goes off like 'ell. But—would you believe it?—there was a Flying Squad bus just behind, and they chased us for miles. You know what those cars can do—well, if you don't I'll tell you: they can do nearly a hundred when they're full out. It was only natural that they should get up with us sooner or later—and they did, just around Shepherd's Bush. . . . Now, don't get impatient, guv'nor; I'm tellin' you as quickly as I can. . . . I 'ad the tear-gas bomb all ready and I flung it right in front of the car, and it put that out of action. But, would you believe it, the big feller—you know who I mean—he jumps like a cat from one car to another (when we was both doing over seventy, mind you), and he gets 'old of The Glider

by 'is throat. . . . Oh, God, I shan't forget it in a 'urry, I can tell you. 'E was like a tiger—'e catches The Glider by the throat, as I was saying just now, and they both go out of the car like a pair of dogs 'aving a scrap. I never saw anything like it in me life before. . . . Well, of course, we 'ad to get away, but I've just 'eard that when they picked The Glider up he was dead—that big feller 'ad squeezed all the life out of 'im. I thought you'd better know straight away ; that's why I'm ringin' up now."

"All right," said Hamme.

But the thin croak of a voice continued :

"Wot about the money, guv'nor? The boys are getting anxious, and you know what you promised."

Hamme did some quick thinking. He realized that if he went back on his word he might find a knife in his back at any hour of the day or night. You cannot form a link with the underworld without grave personal risk.

"You shall have it tomorrow morning at ten o'clock without fail."

"Why not tonight?"

"Because I haven't got it."

Hamme heard his audience whistle.

"Ten o'clock tomorrow morning, then, guv'nor—but remember, the boys will be waiting, and they're apt to get impatient——"

"I know," snapped the listener ; "you shall have it. Now ring off."

The reflections which flooded through Aubrey Hamme's mind as he sat crouched in his chair after that brief telephonic talk were not pleasant. What cursed luck ! But as he poured himself out a stiff drink he reminded himself that things might have been worse. So far as he could tell, no connection had been traced between him and the thwarted murder that night—no connection on the part of the police, that was. Standish himself would probably think that Rahusen had been at the back of the scheme. There remained only the covert threat from

the Soho underworld. Fifty pounds he had promised The Glider if the thing went through satisfactorily—and he hadn't fifty shillings at the moment. But he would have to find the money, even if he pawned everything he possessed. He would be running far too grave a risk to keep those Sohoese from their promised reward. The Glider was not the only member of that fraternity who could use a knife. . . .

But where was he to get fifty quid? Until he heard from his superior again it was a case of very short commons indeed. As an indication of this, he was smoking gasper cigarettes instead of Punch Coronas. The taste in his mouth made him feel sick. And he was hungry too. Oh, well, that matter could be settled without much difficulty. Gustave, round in Frith Street, would let him chalk it up on the slate.

Hamme was reaching for his hat and coat, preparatory to putting the Soho restaurateur's goodwill to the test, when there came a loud knocking on the door. Who the devil could that be? His voice was not its usual steady self when he called, "Come in." Perhaps The Glider's friends, becoming impatient, had refused to wait until the following morning. . . . But the person who entered in response to his call was no more alarming a figure than Mrs. Tweedie, his present landlady. Mrs. Tweedie, as she so frequently informed her guests, had seen better days. Indeed, the woman herself resembled nothing so much as a once-fine edifice rapidly crumbling to ruin. Gin helped. . . .

"Here's a telegram for you, Mr. Hamme," she stated—and hiccupped loudly. "I thought as how, seeing it might be important, I'd bring it up myself instead of trusting it to that Louisa. You know what servant-girls are, perhaps, Mr. 'Amme? They think of nothing but these young men and the pictures. I don't know what's coming over them, I'm sure. Here"—with a second resounding hiccup—"is your telegram, Mr. Hamme."

It was obvious that the woman had been at her favourite tipple again, but, beyond flashing her a look of

Eton can give to its sons, and the garage owner raised no quibble when the prospective hirer said that he would pay for the car when he got back. Mentally, Hamme made the reservation that his employer should cough up pretty dearly for that trip into the wilds of Kent at such short notice.

The man who had lit the match cursed as the flame licked his fingers. What was the sense in making all this mystery about the business? Why the hell couldn't the fellow be brought back without all this fuss? It seemed absurd to him. His rapidly rising anger subsided somewhat, however, when, after perusing the map again, he found that he must be within half a mile or so of the rendezvous. Putting in his clutch, he sent the powerful roadster spinning down the country lane.

It was a desolate spot and an eerie wait. All around him Hamme, a town bird, listened to the night noises of the countryside and felt his nerves jingling.

Suppose anything had gone wrong—and a thousand things could have happened, of course—what a fool he would be, sticking there in the mud and muck of the country, waiting—waiting. . . .

Then he stiffened. From somewhere aloft there came a humming noise that could only mean one thing—the arrival of the 'plane on board which was Rahusen.

He signalled with his headlamps as he had been instructed to do in that long telegram, and after a while the 'plane started to descend. He was standing by the side of the car when it finally came to rest in the field on the other side of the country lane.

"So you've come, Hamme!"

"Of course. But why all this hocus-pocus?"

"Mind your own business," was the stern rejoinder. The speaker turned and gave instructions to the two men who had accompanied him on that night journey. The watching Hamme presently saw them lift a limp figure from the 'plane.

"Is he dead?" he inquired.

"Not yet," was the answer. "I want to use him as a bait before that."

"Bait?"

"To catch the Tiger, you fool."

By this time the prisoner had been placed in the car and Hans de Boo was wishing his companions good-bye.

Before the 'plane rose again the car was heading rapidly back in the direction of London.

CHAPTER XXXIV

M. LAROCHE BECOMES ELOQUENT

TIGER had drawn blood ; but the satisfaction of killing that pest The Glider compared very unfavourably with the chagrin he experienced when remembering that Rahusen had so far scored heavily all along the line.

There was still no news concerning the Earl of Quorn. He refused to allow himself to think that his father was dead ; but Torrance's daily reports from Cannes, while detailed enough, contained no information on which either Sir Harker Bellamy or he could act. For all the clues that existed, the earth might have opened to swallow up the missing man.

On the morning of the third day Standish was called to a conference. He had just finished breakfast when the telephone rang.

"Hullo !" he snapped. The ever-gnawing anxiety had played the very deuce with his nerves, and he did not trouble to be polite.

"This is Lellant," he was told. "I've had a message from Paris. Can you come down ?"

Leaving a note for Sonia—his wife, feeling the strain, was having breakfast in bed that morning—Tiger hurried off.

"Well ?" he demanded, directly he was in the Assistant Commissioner's private room.

Sir Harold Lellant waved him to a chair.

"I don't know if it's worth anything at all," he stated, "but I had a telephone message from Gaboreau, Chief of the Paris Sûreté, half an hour ago, saying that

he would be glad if I could send over someone responsible to consult with him."

"Is it about my father's case?"

"I presume so. I got him on the wire myself as soon as I could, but Gaboreau said he would prefer a personal interview. I can't go—I'm so dashed busy."

"I'll catch the first 'plane from Croydon," replied Tiger immediately.

At the headquarters of the Sûreté Générale he was greeted by a short, stockily made man, who, but for the extra weight, might have been taken for a brother of The Mole. This was Paul Gaboreau, the famous Chief of Paris Police.

"I had hoped, monsieur, to be able to give you some reassuring news," he started, directly the visitor was seated; "but, as so often happens in police work, what looked like being a strong clue yesterday has led us nowhere. However, M. Laroche, who, as you may have heard, has been co-operating with your M. Torrance, is coming here this afternoon, and he will be able to tell us the latest developments."

Within five minutes the French detective arrived. Tiger liked this heavily built man with the comedian's mobile face immensely. Laroche inspired a sense of confidence, and Standish only wished that in the duel he was waging with Rahusen and his gang he might have had the assistance of this former member of the Sûreté, who now was operating as a private investigator of crime.

"*Mon ami*," said Laroche, sighing gigantically, "I only regret I cannot bring you better news. You see," he went on, "we have been working on the theory that the kidnappers of your father were a gang of robbers belonging to the underworld of Nice. It was their intention, we decided—and now I want you to understand I am referring to the Monte Carlo police and myself—to hold the Earl to ransom. The fact that they did not make any immediate demand for money merely seemed to lend

corroboration to our view. But now . . ." The speaker waved his hand in a gesture closely approaching despair.

"I and those who have worked with me—your good M. Torrance amongst them—have had scarcely no sleep since this affair started. We have worked night and day. Not a stone that has not been—what you say?—uplifted. But now it is with the greatest sorrow that I say we are at a loose end—no, a dead end. All the *canaille* we thought were so intimately associated with this outrage have furnished cast-steel alibis. We could not put one of them into prison if we wanted to. Moreover, I am now convinced," said Laroche, "that none of the band I had in mind have had any connection with this crime. No, *mon ami*, we must look elsewhere—but where, I confess"—shrugging his broad shoulders—"I am at a complete loss to say."

The personal magnetism of the speaker was so great that Tiger, in spite of his overwhelming disappointment, felt he had to console the other.

"I know you've done everything possible, M. Laroche," he said, "and I want you to accept my heartfelt thanks."

"*Monsieur!*" The other took the extended hand and gripped it tightly with both his own.

"And how is Torrance?" asked Standish, feeling embarrassed at the display of so much emotion. That was the worst of these Frenchmen: one never knew whether they intended to stick a knife in one's back or cover one's face with kisses!

"M. Torrance is well." Then M. Laroche brooded; it was as though the question had started a new train of thought in his mind. "That reminds me," he said, after a short pause: "M. Torrance entrusted me with a message. That was in case you, M. Standish, came to Paris today. Your friend said that he hoped soon to have good news for the department and for M.—what is his name?"

"Bellamy!" prompted Tiger.

"Ah, *oui*—Bellamy."

Whilst this duologue had been taking place, M. Paul

Gaboreau had been busying himself with his own affairs. Seated at a wide desk, he slit envelopes, perused documents, jotted down comments on the margins of the latter, lit pungent cigarettes and threw them away again, blew his nose, examined his nails—and all with a rapidity that was perfectly amazing. It was said of Paul Gaboreau that he could do four things at once and do them all better than the average person could hope or expect to perform one.

Now the telephone shrilled, and after listening for a few moments he handed the receiver to Laroche.

"It is for you," he stated—"a call from Cannes."

Tiger stiffened to attention, and his impatience, after watching the face of the French detective for some time, could hardly be controlled; that Laroche was listening to a report of some moment was evident. Finally the detective replaced the receiver—and groaned.

"It is a malediction that I suffer under!" he exclaimed, flinging wide his arms. "M. Standish," he continued, emotion riding high in his voice and finding expression, it would appear, in every fibre of his great body, "I am of all men the most unfortunate. For, *regardez*: I tell you one moment that your friend M. Torrance is gathering information which will bring joy to the heart of your chief—the great M. Bellamy—and then the telephone calls, and out of a clear sky there falls—what? Why, *monsieur*, a blow that is shattering!"

"What is it?" demanded Tiger with British directness.

The detective clenched his right hand and shook it as though challenging the gods.

"Your friend M. Torrance is dead," he stated.

"Dead?"

"Dead, *monsieur*. He was found with a knife in his heart on the rocks overlooking the harbour of Villefranche this morning. This affair, I tell you, is accursed!"

CHAPTER XXXV

SANYA THE CLAIRVOYANTE

THESE were trying days for Sonia as well as for her husband. The thought of that dear old man, the Earl of Quorn, who had been so kind to her from their first moment of meeting, being subjected to physical violence, was almost more than she could bear. And what was almost equally worrying was the knowledge that apparently the police were powerless to do anything in the matter. She had always heard that the French detective service was one of the finest in the world—and yet an outrage like this could be perpetrated under their very noses and the criminals escape scot-free. It was all wrong, of course—and she ached to do something about it.

But—*what*? That was the question. An idea had been forming itself in her mind for some days past, but it required her husband's absence on that flying trip to Paris for her to put it into operation. That morning, as she rested against the pillows after eating her breakfast, she scanned the columns of the *Morning Sentinel*, Fleet Street's most sensational journal, and there, on the front page in a prominent position, screamed these headlines :

SANYA SAYS SHE KNOWS!

CAN FAMOUS CLAIRVOYANTE GIVE THE CLUE TO BAFFLING
MYSTERY?

Time passes, and the mystery of the Earl of Quorn's disappearance merely deepens. Both Scotland Yard and

the French police would appear to be defeated. In any case, the best brains of both organizations have been forced to admit failure so far. Whether they will have any greater success in the future remains to be seen.

But, in the meantime, the whole of this country demands an immediate solution to the mystery, and it demands something else—justice! It is a striking commentary on the weakness of the present Government that such a foul crime can be committed and allowed to pass without the strongest possible protest being made to our French neighbours. Why is it, the man in the street asks, that English men and English women can be murdered—for that is not outside the realm of possibility in the present case, we regret to announce—without this supine Government taking drastic action of some sort? We repeat: Why is this intolerable state of affairs allowed to continue?

In the meantime, as the professional trackers of criminals appear completely at a loss, the editor of the Morning Sentinel yesterday sent a representative to interview the famous Bond Street seer, Madame Sanya, the clairvoyante. Below will be found the result of the talk between the latter and our reporter.

"Is it possible," first asked our representative, "for you to read the past as well as the future?"

"Certainly," replied Sanya.

"Then will you please answer me this question: Can you direct your powers to throwing some light on the most mysterious happening of the past six months?"

The famous seer moved in her seat.

"You mean the disappearance of the Earl of Quorn, of course?" she said in a rich, liquid voice.

"Yes."

"I will reply briefly to your question. It is possible for me to probe the past as well as to look ahead into the future: but before I make any announcement on this point I must tell you quite distinctly that I should only be willing to tell you of what I 'see' in the presence of a fully responsible and experienced police officer. I should also require to have in my possession an article belonging to the

Earl of Quorn—something intimate and personal for preference, such as a cigarette-case—a pipe if he smoked one, a handkerchief, or an article of clothing.”

It now rests with the authorities (concluded the article) whether the powers—remarkable as these have been proved to be in the past—of a famous clairvoyante shall be utilized for the public good. In other words, will the Commissioner of Scotland Yard not be above asking the aid of science to solve a mystery which has proved too much for the ordinary methods of crime detection?

Although written with a distinct trend to sensationalism—the *Morning Sentinel* believed in presenting its news with a shrill cry of alarm together with a great deal of flag-waving—Sonia considered the article sufficiently important to engage her full attention. It was quite possible that this clairvoyante, a woman gifted, it was evident, with a mental vision beyond the understanding of the ordinary person, was not presuming on the credulity of the general public. In any case, she was going to see her that day. She would take one of the Earl's old pipes. This briar, smoked to the colour of a ripe plum, and burnt down on one side, had been left at Chester Street some months before, and she had kept it out of sentiment; for Sonia knew men sufficiently well to realize that a pipe represented perhaps the most intimate possession that a man could cherish. This particular specimen, although an old friend, had not been pressed for by the Earl once he knew that his daughter-in-law would like to keep it as a sentimental relic.

No sooner was the resolution formed than she decided to act on it. After dressing, she called into conference Benny Bannister.

The latter looked like a depressed gnome as he stood waiting for his mistress to speak. Benny did not know what was coming to things; life had developed into a series of events each more startling than the one that had gone before. The ex-professional footballer, indeed,

had reached the state when, if he had been told that the end of the world was coming within the next quarter of an hour, he would not merely have believed, but almost welcomed, the statement.

Sonia started with a question.

"You know Tiger has gone to Paris, Benny?"

"Yes, m'lady, I do—and I can't say that I agree with it."

In spite of her anxiety she was forced to smile.

"Why not, Benny?"

"Why, not, m'lady? Because—begging your pardon—I think as 'ow I should 'ave gone with the guv'nor—that's why not. Supposin' anythin' should 'appen to 'im over in that there Paris?"

"Nothing will happen, Benny." But, all the same, the words caused her new-found courage to slip a notch.

"Beggin' your pardon, 'ow are we to tell, m'lady?" persisted the old body-servant. "It's not for me to complain, p'raps, m'lady," Benny continued, "and yet it's almost more than flesh and blood can stand, all these goings-on—and the guv'nor keepin' me out in the cold all the time. It didn't use to be like this. Is 'e afraid I shall let 'im down or somethin'?"

A white hand reached out and patted the broad shoulder.

"You're being fanciful, Benny," his mistress said; "it's because Tiger wants you at home to look after me that he's gone to Paris on his own. You see," she went on, knowing now she had struck the right note, "I'm being threatened as well as the Earl."

Benny's honest, rugged face assumed an expression of almost frightening ferocity.

"Let 'em come 'ere," he exploded; "that's all I arsk—let 'em come! My Gawd—beggin' your pardon, m'lady—I've never wanted to kill a fellow creetur before, but when I think of that murdering hound Rahoosen, or whatever his name is, I feel I could cut a throat with any one of 'em—yes, and drink a pint

of beer after it even if the whole of the police was lookin' on!"

"I can understand what you must be feeling, Benny. But now I want to ask your advice about something. Have you got that pipe of yours? Because, if so, you may smoke it—in fact, I wish you would."

Lighting a cigarette herself, Sonia settled in her husband's capacious leather chair (this talk was taking place in the den) and proceeded with the conversation.

"Have you seen the *Sentinel* this morning, Benny?" she enquired.

"If you mean, 'ave I read that nonsense about a fortune-teller being able to tell wot's 'appened to the Earl—yes, I 'ave, m'lady," was the reply.

"Don't you think there may be something in it, then?"

"No, I don't!" The reply was further strengthened by a vigorous shake of the head.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," he heard his mistress remark, "because I think of ringing up and asking Madame Sanya for an appointment this afternoon."

Bannister, taking the short pipe out of his mouth, scratched his head with the vulcanite stem.

"In that case, m'lady, I'm sorry I spoke—of course."

"You needn't be sorry," she told this knight of the rueful countenance; "it was an honest opinion, and I respect it as such. But think, Benny," she went on, excitement giving an added glamour to her always attractive voice, "think if I *could* persuade this woman to tell us what really happened!"

"Never forgettin' m'lady, that she may not know herself."

Sonia refused to be side-tracked.

"Some fortune-tellers are wonderfully clever—we mustn't forget that. And I feel that every attempt should be made to solve this terrible mystery; it breaks my heart to think of the Earl . . ." She broke off, being unable to continue. "I'll tell you what I'm going to do," Sonia continued after a moment's pause: "I'm

going to ring up the *Sentinel* office, and if they say this Madame Sanya is really clever as a fortune-teller I'm going to see her. What do you say?"

"It's for you to decide, m'lady," returned Bannister. Obviously he had no great faith in the proposal.

Five minutes later his mistress turned to him triumphantly.

"What did I tell you?" she exclaimed. "They put me on to the editor himself, and he said he would not have printed the article this morning unless he had been certain of two things—first, that Madame Sanya was possessed of really remarkable gifts, and secondly, that he considered the police should call in her aid."

"They won't—you can be certain of that, m'lady."

"Then I shall go myself," declared Sonia, and went to the telephone again.

CHAPTER XXXVI

K.O. FOR BENNY

STANDING in the well-dressed crowd that thronged the Bond Street pavement, Benny was a prey to conflicting emotions. It was now over an hour since his mistress had entered the side door of the imposing shop, and he was beginning to fear that something very wrong had occurred. To his severely practical mind, fortune-telling of any sort was so much childish nonsense. What was going to happen was going to happen—and there was an end of it. Besides, what was the good of anticipating trouble? Time enough for that when it actually came. . . .

Still, he had raised no more active protest when his mistress had ordered the car and given him the address in the heart of Mayfair's shopping centre. She had determined to see this woman, and it was not his place to put forward any further objection. She had been able to tell from his manner that he wasn't enthusiastic—but that was as far as he could go.

He now pushed back his chauffeur's cap and ruffled the sparse hair over his forehead. What excuse could he give if he went up those narrow stairs? On the other hand, he had a growing premonition that something was wrong—very wrong.

Finally he made up his mind. Even if he got ticked off for it, he was going to see his mistress and ascertain if she was all right. Grimly determined, he walked up the stairs—the thought came irresistibly to his mind that **Mme Sanya might have put in a lift for the greater**

comfort of her wealthy patrons—and, arriving on the first landing, knocked on a door on which were painted the words :

SANYA—CLAIRVOYANTE

There was no answer. This silence he considered sinister, and without much ado he flung back the door and crossed the threshold.

What followed represented the most eerie experience that Benny had known to date. The room into which he stepped was in darkness except for a light burning at the other end. The walls of this strange chamber looked as though they were draped in black velvet, so deep was the gloom.

The light seemed to exert an hypnotic effect on him ; it drew him like a moth is drawn to a candle. For perhaps the first time in his experience Benny knew the meaning of real terror. The feeling he had had on the pavement outside was not to be compared with this ; that had been mere uneasiness of mind : this was stark terror of soul. A cold shiver ran through him. The effect of this room was uncanny ; he felt that he was being swallowed by a monster that had a velvet-lined cavern for mouth. And the smell ! The atmosphere was thick and choky. Somewhere or other incense of a kind must be burning. . . .

Then quite suddenly the lights went out. He was in total darkness.

"M'lady . . . m'lady !" Benny called.

There was no reply.

Then the monster closed in on him. He felt himself choking ; the breath went out of his lungs, and he fell back—back into a pit that seemed to have no bottom. . . .

How many hours had elapsed, Benny could not conceive, but when he awoke out of that phantasmagoric slumber he found a man, who looked like a caretaker, staring down at him.

"Wot's the big idear?" the latter demanded beligerently.

Benny took his time in replying. For one thing, he had a taste in his mouth that was like the wrath of God. For another thing, his head ached abominably—and thirdly, he felt perishingly cold. The back of his neck might have been made of ice.

He turned and discovered the reason: he was leaning against an ash-bin—an ash-bin that smelt horribly.

"Didn't yer 'ear me—wot's the big idear?"

Benny rose slowly to his feet. The question was becoming monotonous. Moreover, he didn't like the speaker's face: it was pimply and ill-shaven; Benny felt he would like to hit it—and almost succumbed to the temptation.

Instead:

"Do you mind telling me where I am?" he enquired with a meekness that surprised even himself.

The caretaker person proceeded to give a voluble reply. Out of the mass of words Bannister sorted sufficient to learn that the exact position of his awakening was in the basement of the shop in Bond Street.

"What time is it?" he then asked.

"'Arf past six."

"At night?"

"No—in the morning, you fool."

The ex-professional footballer removed himself farther away from that horribly smelling dust-bin.

"I must be going," he stated.

"'Ere, not so fast. Wot's the big idear?"

Benny shrugged his shoulders as though here were shaking off a number of slugs.

"Don't say that again—d'ye 'ear me? Don't say that again."

"And why not?"

"Because if you do I swear to God I'll knock you sick! Listen!" And he proceeded to give the open-mouthed janitor a brief résumé of his latest contact with the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.

"Blimey!" retorted the other when he had come to an end. "It's like a ruddy film!"

Benny waited to hear no more. He wanted a higher grade of consolation than could be provided by a cinemasated cleaner-out of offices.

He had to get out of this place whilst both his reason and his temper lasted. Black magic had apparently been at work. He still felt like something that had been left over from a massacre, and what had happened during the transitory change from that atmosphere-drugged clairvoyance chamber to the alleyway presided over by that oyster-eyed caretaker, whose family crest appeared to be one ash-bin *couchant*, he dared not think. His immediate job was to get back home. If his mistress were not there safe and sound, he'd ring up the police—but first of all he had to get back home.

Bond Street at that early hour presented a melancholy appearance. Vanished were the sex-charged stares of the society hussies whom the newspapers flattered by calling "lovelies". Gone were the well-dressed crooks and confidence men seeking whom they might attempt to devour with a maximum of profit and a minimum of risk—this street of luxury and fashion might have been a deserted thoroughfare on an uninhabited planet for all the life it showed. It was not until Benny reached Piccadilly that he came into the land of humans.

Opposite the Ritz he signalled a taxi. The driver, who looked as though he had either left domestic trouble behind him or was anticipating it when he returned home, regarded his prospective fare in surly fashion.

"Where's your own bus?" he enquired.

It was not until then that Benny realized that the Bentley had vanished. He had had too much to think about to pay much attention to this particular aspect of the tragedy before, and he wasn't going to bandy words with this beetle-browed son of a gun now.

Giving the address, he got into the cab and banged the door.

"Step on it," he adjured.

Long before he reached the turning into Chester Street Benny saw the blaze lighting up the early-morning sky. A fire—it looked as though it was pretty near home too.

The finish to his London night adventure was furnished when he stared with horror-stricken eyes at his beloved master's house ravaged by flames.

"Oh, my God!" he muttered.

This thing couldn't be happening; he was dreaming it. But the unpleasant-visaged taxi-driver was holding out one hand for the fare and pointing with the other to the blazing house.

"You seem to 'ave left it a bit late, mate," he smirked.

Benny could have hit him—in all probability he would have hit him, had he not at that moment been hurled almost off his feet.

"Where the hell have you been, Bannister?" cried a voice.

Benny turned to a Tiger Standish who looked as though some great upheaval had driven him mad. It was not the fact that his employer's face was begrimed and that his clothes were ruined—this phenomenon could be accounted for by the circumstance of Standish having helped the firemen—which caused Benny's heart to leap in his breast.

"'Ow did it 'appen, guv'nor?" he implored.

"I'll tell you later. Where's your mistress? She was left in your charge—where is she?"

"'Eaven 'elp me, guv'nor, but I don't know."

"Don't know?" For a moment it seemed that Standish would hurl him to the ground. But he conquered the impulse. "Nothing would be gained by playing the fool," Benny heard him mutter to himself. And then: "Tell me all you know, Benny."

The recital of the bare facts did not take more than a couple of minutes.

"And that's all?" said Standish at the end.

"That's all, guv'nor."

In return, his employer explained that, arriving

home round about midnight from Paris, he had spent several hours going from house to house and from place to place trying to find his wife. It was only when he returned at dawn, worn out and utterly exhausted mentally and physically, that he discovered a fresh catastrophe had occurred.

"Whilst I was away, Benny," he said, his face a fixed mask, "some swine deliberately set fire to the house with petrol."

"Wot about the servants, guv'nor?"

"Two of the maids have been sent off to the hospital suffering from bad burns, and Pringle owes his life to not being able to sleep last night through an attack of neuralgia."

"Then if the mistress *had* been home . . ."

"Perhaps she would, Benny," he said, answering the unspoken question. "And for that I am supremely thankful. But that doesn't alter the fact that Rahusen or some of his gang have got hold of her. I'll find her, though, if I have to go through every den in London! . . . What was the address of that clairvoyante's place?"

Benny told him.

"But it's no good going there, guv'nor. It was all a plant. I can see it now."

He stopped, for his master's face was not good to see.

"Look!" he cried a moment later. "There's Dick!"

Sure enough, the bedraggled creature, that was a mere mockery of his usual majestic self, proved to be the half-Persian. Richard the Lion miaow-ed at his master piteously, after rubbing his dripping fur against Standish's leg, and Tiger, his features relaxing, stooped and picked him up in his arms.

"Poor little devil!" he said, and hugged the cat to his breast.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE PLACE OF TERROR

SONIA stared about her uncertainly until her eyes met those of the woman. The latter was dressed in a dark-greyish uniform and might have been a nurse. Either a nurse—or a wardress.

But she wasn't in prison! She had done nothing that could have caused her to be sent to gaol.

Then where was she? What was this poorly furnished room, containing the mere essentials—a narrow hospital bed, the plainest washstand equipment, bare boards, and . . . why had those iron bars been placed outside the small windows? Then this *was* a prison! . . .

"Are you feeling better now?"

It was the woman speaking, and her voice gave Sonia a sense of unreasoning fear impossible to describe, and yet very real. Why this should be so she was unable to tell; all she knew was that a kind of stealthy terror seeped into her blood, making her tremble.

Somehow she found her voice.

"I'm all right," she said; "but I don't know you and—where am I?"

The woman, who was powerfully built—the massive lines of her figure showed up prominently beneath that tight-fitting grey dress—had an uncannily direct stare: hard, unblinking, inflexible. She looked at her questioner for a full two minutes before she answered.

Then:

"You are in a nursing home. You have been ill. You require *rest*."

It was the way she underlined the word "rest", giving special emphasis to it, that completed Sonia's earlier misgivings. Now she was forced to realize the truth—and it affrighted her.

She was in an asylum !

That explained everything—the poorly furnished room, the barred window, this grim, even cruel-looking, female gaoler, and the latter's peculiarly penetrating stare.

But—*why* ?

That was the first of a hundred questions that raced one another hot-footed through her bewildered brain. What terrible thing had happened to her ?

"Please send your superior to me," she said.

The woman merely frowned.

"You must not excite yourself," she replied in a metallic tone, and turned towards the door.

With the desperation of despair, Sonia tried to rush past her. But her arm was seized with a brutal strength.

"You must not create any further trouble," she was warned.

The next moment, while she reeled backwards, the door clanged heavily.

She was alone.

Gradually she endeavoured to sort things out. She *must* try to recollect, so that some sort of sense could be gained out of the hideous jumble of fear, misapprehension, and general confusion.

She started at the beginning—from the talk she had had with Benny Bannister—how long ago was that ? She could not remember.

Her father-in-law had disappeared, and she was anxious to find where the Earl had been taken by his enemies whilst Tiger, her husband, was in Paris. Yes, that was it. Then what had happened ? She had gone to a clairvoyante woman in Bond Street—a fortune-teller who had said in the Press that she knew where the Earl of Quorn could be found.

After that ? Yes, she was able to recall things much

more clearly now. She had kept the appointment made with the woman over the telephone, and had been shown into a large, dimly lit room, the walls of which looked as though they were draped in black velvet.

Almost immediately upon entering she had begun to feel faint . . . and then the Woman had come. Not the woman who had just left this room, but the One who walked swayingly towards her, holding a huge crystal ball in her hands. . . .

She was not able to remember anything more—at least, not clearly—for after that everything had become blurred. She only recalled feeling control go out of her body, and falling . . . *falling*. . . .

And now—this Place of Terror.

In a well-furnished room below, Sanya, the clairvoyante of Bond Street, was talking to a man wearing rimless eye-glasses. Perhaps it was his high cheekbones that gave Dr. Ponsford Fane his unsatisfactory appearance—or, of course, it may have been that his mode of life—his personal conduct as well as the manner in which he earned his very substantial income—reflected itself in his face. In either event, he was a person from whom one wished to avert the eyes after the first moment of greeting.

Sanya emphasized her point.

"You will keep her here until further instructions are received. She may become violent, of course—in all probability she will—but in that case you will know what to do?"

The keeper of that home of rest, which certain people (providing they were sufficiently wealthy) had discovered during the last few years was very, very useful and accommodating when they wanted to rid themselves of annoying relatives, smiled understandingly.

"But of course, dear lady," he said.

"That's all right, then—he will pay. And now I must be off—I'm sailing for New York tomorrow morning."

"Leaving England? I imagined——"

"Oh, I was pulling in the stuff O.K., but I've had the feeling for some time that I was being trailed—and after this I've decided to give little old Broadway a treat. 'Get a load on this,' I shall say, as I step off the boat. . . . But what's all that racket about?" she broke off to demand, as a noise, growing in volume, was heard outside.

"I'm sure I don't know, but I will soon see," replied Dr. Ponsford Fane, whose usually florid face had perceptibly paled.

But before he could move the door was flung open.

In stepped a man—a man at whose face Sanya the clairvoyante gave only one look before she stretched out a hand for her bag on the near-by table.

"I shouldn't trouble," said a sardonic voice: "I've got you both covered!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE DEPUTY

TIGER stamped his foot.

"But where has he gone?" he demanded.

Sir Harker Bellamy's secretary shrugged his shoulders wearily.

"I haven't the least idea, Mr. Standish. You ought to know what The Mole is like by now—here one minute, gone the next. He's on some job, I suppose. That's as much as I can tell you, I'm sorry to say."

On a job! On a job, when there were roughly about a million things to be seen to in London! On a job, when the Earl of Quorn had probably been murdered by his enemies! On a job, when Sonia had vanished as though the earth had opened to swallow her up! On a job . . . So much for The Mole's asseverations. Hadn't he promised to help him in this Rahusen stunt?

Standish stormed to the door.

"Well, you can tell him when he comes back that he can go to hell. Got that quite clearly in your head?"

The other nodded, and Tiger, opening the door, thrust his large body into the adjacent corridor. As he did so he bumped into a Q.I. commissioner. The latter, a burly ex-sergeant of Dragoons, grinned as he recognized the extremely angry young man.

"Hullo, Mr. Standish!" he said. "It's nice to see you again. By the way"—holding out a letter—"there's something that's come addressed to you care of Sir Harker."

It was with an almost mechanical movement that

Standish took the letter. But immediately he noticed that the postmark was "Cannes" his lethargy vanished.

"Thanks, Morris," he said, and went back into the office again. Directly the door was shut behind him he ripped open the envelope. This had borne Torrance's handwriting. But Torrance was dead—Laroche had told him so twenty-four hours before, in Paris. Then . . .

"Quick!" he was shouting a moment later. "Give me the D.F. code-books."

"What's the matter?" enquired Sir Harker Bellamy's secretary.

"Matter? I don't know; but give me those code-books. There's something here from Torrance."

"Torrance? But you told me that——"

"I know. But this is his writing, isn't it?" He passed the sheet of paper, on which was written what appeared to be a mass of meaningless words and figures, over to the other.

"Yes," came the agreement, "that's Torrance's writing all right—the poor devil."

He was quickly snapped out of his sympathetic mood.

"The D.F. code-books," demanded Tiger again.

Twenty minutes later Standish pushed across the complete transcription.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

The secretary put a hand up to his neat moustache.

"It's just as well that The Mole isn't in London, if this can be relied upon," was the reply.

"Ugh!" grunted Standish, and left the other to his reflections.

Tiger waited, every nerve taut.

It was a curious situation. If Torrance's information was genuine—as, of course, must be the case—there would come presently through that open window a man who had murder as his object. Incidentally he would have to be a criminal of the cat-burglar type, but ordinary plunder he would scorn. It was a man's life that he desired.

The letter from Torrance which he had decoded

that afternoon referred specifically to the conversation the Secret Service man had overheard whilst in an abominable house of strange sins at Monte Carlo, which he called the Villa Russe. The participants in this talk had been Hans de Boo and Emil Voltag, and the subject discussed was the necessity for the urgent removal of Sir Harker Bellamy from his present sphere. When Voltag had enquired of his companion what he was doing in the matter of the Chief of Q.I, Hans de Boo had passed to him certain particulars. It was these which Torrance now sent.

In case The Mole is away, I am sending this to you, Standish [the letter had proceeded]. For God's sake look after the old man. I daren't wire because I'm being watched, I think, and a telegram would probably not get through. But you can take this as the goods.

The Mole's peculiarities were well known, aparently—including his partiality for fresh air when he slept. Well, the window was open wide enough. . . .

Groves, the manservant who had grown grey in Bellamy's service, had expressed no surprise when Tiger announced his intention of occupying Bellamy's bedroom that night.

"Very good, sir," he merely stated. Groves was used to his master's mysterious comings and goings. Bellamy himself had once been heard to say that he was willing to bet Groves would not move a muscle of his face if he (Bellamy) told him that he had an appointment with the devil.

If the odds had not been so serious, Standish might have found his present position amusing. This playing deputy for a man who had been selected as a ripe subject for assassination certainly had its comical side. He would have been better pleased, however, if he could have held some communication with Bellamy prior to starting this vigil; but neither sign nor word had come from the Chief of Q.I since he returned from Paris. It was not

possible, he supposed, that the Rahusen crowd had got hold of The Mole beforehand? No, he thought not: the little grey man was a very good hand at trumping aces, and he had lived through too many perils to be caught napping. But still, what the deuce did he mean by keeping out of the way in this manner? It was damned annoying.

Tiger rose in order to ease his stiff muscles, and walked across to the window. Bellamy's flat was situated high up in a block overlooking St. James's Park. One reason he had chosen this particular set of rooms was because of his passion for fresh air, whilst another reason was that he hated noise.

As he looked down from this eyrie, Tiger decided that, whatever the reward might have been, he wouldn't have cared himself—that was, of course, assuming that he had joined the criminal classes—to have volunteered for this particular job. One false step, and the climber would assuredly break his neck.

He was still at the window when a sense of caution forced him to step back quickly. It was a darkish night, but he had the eyes of a cat, and surely that was a man's head showing itself round the side of the balcony below? Now was the time for the second act in the drama: crouching on the farther side of the bed, he awaited developments.

These were not long in coming. By what means the fellow had covered the space between the balcony below and the open window, short of crawling fly-fashion, he did not know—but within a few minutes a dark shape blotted out what light there was. Tiger saw that the man had a knife between his teeth before the intruder swung one leg after the other over the window-sill.

Now that he straightened himself with a low grunt of relief, Standish judged that the other was a foreigner—and probably a sailor. In any case, he carried himself like one.

For a couple of minutes nothing was heard but the deep intake of breath as the climber drew air into his

tortured lungs. That climb must have taxed his strength to the limit.

Presently the restrained gasps grew perceptibly fainter and less frequent.

"Now!" Tiger whispered to himself.

Taking from his pocket a small electric torch, the prospective murderer directed the light on to the bed. Tiger had some difficulty in keeping back a chuckle: the wig that rested on the pillow was most realistic!

Action followed quickly after that. The assassin stepped forward like some padding jungle beast, raised his right hand holding the knife, and plunged it with terrific force—*into the bolster that Tiger had so artistically arranged!*

One blistering oath—and then his lips were closed to further profanity: they were fully occupied in fighting for air. For Tiger, taking advantage of the other's deep sense of surprise, reached out from his hiding-place, caught hold of the man's throat—and held on.

Five minutes later Groves was startled to hear a loud hammering at his door. Opening it, he stared at a slightly dishevelled Standish.

"Sorry to bother you, Groves," the latter stated, "but I want you to get me a red-hot poker."

"A red-hot poker, sir?"

"Yes—and see it *is* hot."

CHAPTER XXXIX

HANS DE BOO BOASTS

THE Earl of Quorn shook his head.

"You can do what you like with me, you infernal scoundrel," he said, "but I will not write a note, nor will I speak on the telephone. You can rest assured that my son will be here sooner or later without any invitation on your part."

The man he was addressing bared his teeth in a snarl.

"I notice you say 'sooner or later'," he remarked. "Have you considered that he may come too late?"

"I've considered everything. And here is something for your own reflection: rest assured that my death will be adequately avenged by my son."

"But my dear Lord Quorn," was the answer, "I haven't even considered the possibility of your death—yet. We have plenty of time in which to make you change your mind."

"Nothing will make me change my mind."

"Well, we shall see. And now, if you will excuse me, I must leave you again."

Although thankful to be alone, the Earl, directly the door closed behind the speaker, had to fight to keep back the rising waves of despair. Beyond the fact that he had been brought back to London, he had not the least idea where he was. The infernal scoundrel into whose hands he had fallen had amused himself by saying that he was within a short distance of his own home—but beyond that no hint was given.

On the physical side he had nothing very much about which to complain. They had not begun to torture

him yet, although, now that he had definitely refused to write that decoy note to his son, measures of that sort might be started at any moment. But nothing, as he had said, would induce him to put pen to paper, or lips to telephone receiver. Tiger and Bellamy between them—with the possible help of Scotland Yard—would find him in time. He told himself he was absolutely confident on this point.

In a low-roofed passage outside the door of the room in which he was keeping the Earl a prisoner, Hans de Boo was listening to a hectic flow of words from "Spike" Read. The chieftain of London's gangdom, with whom he had formed a temporary alliance, was agitated.

"Sailor ought to be back by now," he said. "I don't like it. If the dicks have got hold of him there'll be trouble. I'm not so sure but what you ought to clear out of here right away."

The statement was disquieting. It did not suit Hans de Boo's purpose to clear out—this hideaway was the best, probably, in the whole of the Metropolitan area, and he would not be satisfied until he had seen Standish either walk or be carried into the place.

"Don't worry," he said, with his best attempt at reassurance. "Tell Hamme I want to see him."

When Aubrey Hamme appeared, de Boo took him by the arm.

"I've got to be away for a couple of hours," he said, "and I'm going to leave you in charge of Quorn. See that nothing happens while I'm gone."

"What can happen?"

"I don't know—but see that it doesn't. And don't let these crooks frighten you. I'm paying them well, and that's all that matters. Now, you understand me quite clearly—I am holding you responsible for the Earl whilst I am away."

"Don't worry," was the reply. "Even if his legs were any use to him, I wouldn't let him run off."

Sonia was pleading hard.

"But, Sir Harker, you *must* let me see Tiger!"

"My dear," said the Chief of Q.I., "I want you to listen to me seriously for a moment. Don't think that I don't appreciate your anxiety, but at the same time I want you to believe me when I say that it is best for everyone concerned if you stay under cover here—at least for a day or so. Many things—dreadful things—are happening in London, and I want you out of them. Don't forget that this man Rahusen—Hans de Boo, or whatever his real name may be—has sworn to your husband that he will do you some grave injury. Already he has the Earl of Quorn in his power, and is probably hunting for Tiger just as keenly as Tiger is hunting for him. You are one of the big prizes in this game—and I am very serious indeed when I say that I want you to keep out of the trouble. Directly I am free to do so, I will come and fetch you; in the meantime, you will be perfectly safe here—safe, for the very good reason that no one knows you *are* here."

"But can't I write to Tiger?"

The Mole nodded.

"Of course you can write to Tiger—and I will post the letter myself. But let it be brief; just a line to say that you are safe, and—well, but that you have gone away to keep out of danger."

She smiled.

"He won't believe that—the part about leaving him, I mean."

"You can put all the blame down to me. Now, here"—handing her a fountain-pen—"you are. But, as I say, make it as short as you can: I want to get away—what that woman Sanya has told me, or, rather, what I forced her to tell me, is very disquieting."

If Sonia had not possessed the most complete confidence in the speaker, she would still have hesitated. As it was, she wrote swiftly:

Darling: Don't worry about me—I am safe and well . . .

and signed it with her name.

During the past twenty minutes she had been listening to an astonishing story. Sir Harker Bellamy had told her facts which she would have declared incredible coming from any other source. According to the Chief of Q.I., Sanya the clairvoyante, under this professional cloak, was one of the most dangerous of all foreign agents. She had worked for the Germans in the World War, and had won a reputation which placed her at the very head of her unscrupulous class. Coming to England nine months before, she had rapidly built up a wealthy clientele amongst the foolish and credulous, and it was because she numbered so many influential people amongst her customers that Bellamy had not been able to move as quickly as he would have liked. But all the time his men were secretly gathering information about this former enemy of Great Britain, and it had been definitely established that Louise Eberhard had not forsaken her real calling, although she had changed her employers.

She now spied for Kronstadt, and, judging by the stories which his staff brought to him, Bellamy decided that her brain had not lost its cunning. Her procedure was simple, but efficient: under the pretext of reading their future, Sanya got to know quite a lot about her clients' pasts. When the customer in question belonged to either the Navy or the Army—and it was a matter for profane comment on the part of Bellamy how superstitious the members of both Services could be!—she made very good use of her opportunities. There was the matter of the new machine-gun that had been tried out in secret at Aldershot, whilst he had every reason to believe that full details of the new battle-cruiser class had also crossed the water; in fact, his case against the woman had been completed on the very day Sonia had decided, in all innocence, to pay her a professional visit.

"I didn't like doing it," Bellamy went on to say, forgetting apparently that he was talking to someone outside his own immediate circle, "but I simply had to have the information from this woman. So I . . ."

He had pulled himself up short then, and Sonia, although curious to know what had been about to follow, did not dare to ask him the question that was hovering on her lips. Her own intuition supplied the answer: Bellamy had offered this dangerous woman spy her liberty providing she "came through" with the answers to his questions.

Putting the envelope which she had just addressed into his pocket, Bellamy now wished her good-bye.

"You'll promise me not to leave here?" he said as he stood in the doorway.

"I promise," she replied. "But how long shall I have to stay?"

"That depends," was the non-committal answer.

CHAPTER XL

THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR

ALL the enmity that Aubrey Hamme felt for Tiger Standish was now finding a vent.

"You think your son is a very wonderful person, no doubt," he told the cripple in the chair ; "but I think it only fair to inform you that very soon he will be put out of action just about as efficiently as you are yourself. The mistake he made in the first place was butting in where he was not wanted ; but he won't do much more of that kind of thing. I don't mind admitting he's been lucky up to now, but we've got a new kind of killer on the books at the moment—a man who never fails—and directly Bellamy—oh, I forgot, you didn't know about Bellamy, did you ?" he broke off to enquire. "Well, now, I'll try to explain. At this very moment, or as near as doesn't matter, Sir Harker Bellamy, C.M.G., is having his own goose nicely cooked. It may appear quite a trifle to you, but Bellamy sleeps with his window wide open, and the man we have engaged for this job claims to be the best cat-burglar in London. Now do you understand ?"

The Earl kept his eyes closed. He had heard enough ; his endurance was exhausted, and he would not allow this fellow any more satisfaction than he had allowed his superior. Let him babble on.

"So you see," the voice continued, "Bellamy, sleeping at such a height, would never consider himself in danger, but this 'Sailor Jack', as he is known in the underworld, swears there's nothing built that he can't climb. And after he's finished Bellamy he has his orders concerning

your son. Not that he's got to kill him outright, you understand. The future Earl of Quorn has to be brought here first—into this hideaway, which is eighty feet or so underground, and to which more than twelve people in the world don't know the way in."

The Earl, his eyes closed, still apparently dozed on. His heart was heavy; everything the other was boasting about was evidently true—or as near the truth as made no difference. The luck had gone against Tiger; he had been dealt the wrong cards. When he thought of his beloved son falling into the hands of this gang of ruthless criminals, who had sworn a death-feud against him, the courage which had sustained him ever since his capture fell away. He had the utmost difficulty in maintaining his pride. He wanted to bargain, to make terms—even if his appeal would fall on deaf ears.

There was Sonia too. What would she do, poor child, when Tiger was gone?

"Oh, God!" he softly groaned.

"Did I hear you speak?" asked Hamme. "Hullo!" as the knock, followed in quick succession by two more, sounded on the door at the other end of the room. "Here's Sailor Jack back. He'll be able to tell you all about it. Excuse me for a moment."

With lack-lustre eyes the Earl watched the speaker cross the floor, ask a question, evidently receive an answer—and then pull back the heavy bolt.

The next moment a cry of joy broke from the prisoner's lips.

"*Tiger!*" he called.

CHAPTER XLI

TIGER KILLS

AT the word, Hamme backed, a look of almost ludicrous amazement on his face.

"*You !*" he gasped.

"Yes, I, my most ignoble Hamme-bone," was the response. "In case you didn't know, I have come here to kill you !"

The other, a good three stone the heavier man, backed still farther. But the only exit from that room, deep down in the bowels of the earth, was through the door by which Tiger Standish had so surprisingly come. And there was no possible escape that way—not, at least, until he had got rid of this dangerous intruder.

Then he remembered : he need not wage this fight on his own ; although Standish, by some as yet unexplained means, had managed to penetrate into this believed impregnable stronghold of the London underworld, the place was thronged with men. There were Spike Read, Larry the Bat, and at least half a dozen more.

He opened his mouth to shout—but the cry was never uttered. It was cut off at birth by a blow that sent him reeling backwards.

As he stared into the face of the man who had for so long been his implacable foe, he knew that he must fight this battle himself.

And because a cornered rat has courage of a sort, and because his hatred of the other was almost as deep-rooted and as intense as his enemy's hatred of him, he

rushed in to a clinch. He remembered his superior weight, and hoped that it would turn the balance.

The next moment the two were locked in a death-grip.

With his own breath coming in agonized gasps, the Earl of Quorn watched the thrilling, if morbidly fascinating, spectacle. Tiger had come, as he had told Rahusen he would come—and when he had killed this beast Hamme he would take him away; they would all be united again—Sonia, his boy, and himself. . . .

Thurruup! Thurruup!

That was Tiger's fists beating a tattoo on his enemy's face. Already Hamme was a terrible sight; blood was streaming from nose, eyes, and ears—and still the fight went on.

"Kill him, boy!"

The blood-lust had got hold of the watcher; deep down in his consciousness there stirred a primitive urge begotten of a long line of fighting men, all of whom had won fame and honour on the battlefields of their different generations.

An indistinguishable sound came from Tiger's parted lips as he now shot his hands up and caught Hamme by the throat. He had said he would kill, and he was going to kill—there was no power on earth, he assured himself, which would prevent him from killing this human scum. There were a dozen—a hundred—reasons why he had to clear the earth of this foulness, but one sufficed: the presence of his father in that room. Thank God he had arrived in time! . . .

He could do it easily: Hamme had weakened; he was spent. What struggle he had put up before had been due to desperation; now he realized his end had come, and the terror in his eyes was sickening to see.

Those eyes pleaded mutely for mercy, but he could not have any mercy. He had come to kill, and he was going to kill . . .

He did kill.

But as he turned, after flinging the lifeless mass of flesh away, he saw his father pointing with a shaking finger.

Standing in the doorway was the man Tiger knew as Hans de Boo, and he had a revolver in his hand. What was more, behind him stretched a long line of evil, distorted faces.

"Welcome, my dear Standish," said Hans de Boo. "I have been expecting you for some time. Quite a family gathering, you will notice—first your father, then your good self, and shortly, I hope, your delightful wife."

Tiger could not stand this taunt, and so, regardless of the risk, he darted his hand towards the pocket where he had put the revolver after entering the room. Even scum like Hamme he could not shoot; he had to kill him man-fashion.

A gun barked, a cry rang out.

"You've killed him!" declared the Earl of Quorn, tears rolling down his face as he looked at the limp, still form of his son on the floor.

"That's a pity," was the answer, "because I had anticipated deriving quite a lot of amusement out of your son. . . . No, I'm glad to be able to put your premature fears at rest: you notice that he moves. . . . But you'd better take that gun away from him, Spike," the speaker added, turning to the man standing directly behind him.

The Earl killed his pride.

"Do what you like with me, Rahusen——"

"Who said I was Rahusen? Well, since there's no further reason for hiding the fact, I *am* Rahusen! And now, old man, what particular prayers do you want said over the body of your brat before——"

"Give him a chance," pleaded Quorn. "Do what you like with me—but don't kill my boy."

Rahusen pointed to the huddled form of Aubrey Hamme.

"What is it your Bible says?" he retorted. "'An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth'—and a life for a life.

Standish killed my chief lieutenant—and now I'm going to kill him."

Turning abruptly away he signalled to a couple of his men, but before they could touch Standish, Spike Read had asked a question.

"Say, boss, who is this guy?"

Rahusen gave him a straight answer.

"He's the man your much-advertised friend Sailor Jack was going to bring here after seeing to Bellamy. . . . Something's gone wrong, I should say—but we'll soon find out what it is. Take him away."

The last the Earl saw was his boy's feet as, with one crook carrying his shoulders and the other his legs, Standish was carried out of the room.

CHAPTER XLII

COUNTER-THRUST

TIGER awoke to consciousness at the sound of a hated voice. Looking up, he saw staring at him the man who declared himself to be Rahusen, although his face was entirely different from that Standish had known in the other's previous existence.

The voice continued :

"Several months ago, Standish, you took it on yourself to interfere unwarrantably in my affairs. As the result of that I suffered very considerable inconvenience, having, as a matter of fact, as you know, to leave the country. Whilst I was on the Continent I swore that I would be amply revenged—and now, at long last, has come my opportunity. I said I would get not only you but your wife and father, and I have lived up to my word. Your father is here, you observe, and half an hour ago I sent a telephone message through to the place—it is a private asylum, as a matter of fact—where I had previously arranged for your very charming wife to be taken."

Standish strained at his bonds. Sonia locked up as a lunatic !

"She should be here at any minute now—that is why I have postponed these interesting proceedings. And whilst we are waiting, I may as well give you a brief account of my activities since I returned to London.

"It was through meeting 'a highly placed representative of a certain foreign Power', as newspapers are so apt to call such people, that I had it made worth my while to return to London. There were difficulties, of

course—as Rahusen I was known ; but difficulties are made to be overcome, and so this obstacle was smoothed away in my case : going to a clever facial surgeon in Berlin, I transformed myself—from Rahusen I became Hans de Boo, a well-known Amsterdam dealer in jewels and antiques. The reason I called on you at your charming house in Chester Street that night was to test the genuineness of my—shall I call it ?—disguise.

“Since you will be unable to make any use of the information—for, of course, you will never leave this room alive—I see no reason why I should not tell you that, apart altogether from my idea of private vengeance on you and your relatives, my main object in returning to England was to carry out the wishes of this ‘certain foreign Power’. From the latter’s point of view it was highly desirable that a few people—small in number, but possessing powerful influence—should be ‘removed’. Amongst these there were Lord Belshaven, the Foreign Secretary, and your slightly comic former employer, Sir Harker Bellamy. My superiors in this matter entertained for Bellamy a respect which I could not share. Considering that I have outwitted him at every turn, I think you will agree my judgment on this question is justified.”

The speaker paused before starting on a second chapter.

“You will hear with regret, I know, Standish, that Bellamy is now no longer with us. He has been ‘put away’, and will cause no further trouble. Which, of course, is very unfortunate from your point of view, but life is full of change, and, whilst we may be here today, we are just as frequently no longer here tomorrow.”

Whilst Rahusen stopped to light a cigarette, Tiger told himself he must not believe this fantastic story. If Bellamy were really dead, then he might indeed lose all hope. But he would not credit it. The Mole was far too wily to be caught in any trap of Rahusen’s.

Then quite suddenly he burst out laughing. Of course, the trap in question had been spoilt by himself. If he had not outwitted Rahusen in this particular

respect he would not have been there at all that night, for it was the paid assassin of this boaster who, under extreme pressure (it was wonderful what influence a red-hot poker could wield on occasion), had described in detail this underground den, had handed on a certain password as well as giving him the secret of the five knocks which would gain him admittance.

But now his enemy had lit his cigarette, and was continuing to talk.

"I dare say you would like to know some details now about the murders which have recently convulsed—I think that is the term usually employed—the country? First, then, let us deal with the policeman who was so obligingly placed by your friend, Sir Harold Lellant, outside your father's house in Lowdnes Square. That was a comparatively simple affair; I did that little job myself, using a very matter-of-fact weapon—a knife bought in a sixpenny store. I wanted to show you, Standish, that I was not trifling. The poor fool of a policeman was only too ready to oblige me with a match for my cigarette, and once he had his hands occupied . . ."

"Sir Harold Lellant will be interested to hear that," stated his prisoner.

Rahusen threw away the match he had been holding.

"Still optimistic, I see. Well, they always grant a dying man his last wish in this country, I understand, and it would be cruel to deprive you of that satisfaction.

"The case of Lord Belshaven was rather more difficult—oh, I forgot, there was his secretary before him! But in both those cases the story was the same: I have a certain gift in hypnotism, and it was a comparatively simple matter to 'direct' a certain degenerate medical man, cast off the register several years ago for drunkenness and misconduct with a patient—poor fellow, I am afraid he had given way very badly to drugs. What little will he had left I was easily able to control. Of course, having once been a doctor, he knew where to plant his knife—it amused me to hand to him in each case a weapon similar to the one I bought at the famous sixpenny store.

Crime is so terribly easy if one merely uses one's wits and possesses the requisite nerve. It's the nerve that principally matters. The unfortunate thing is that I am afraid I shall not be able to use this agent again because only last night he fell down some stairs whilst drunk and broke his neck. A pity! But there are others who can be found in this vast London underworld. It is surprising how cheaply one can engage a professional murderer."

"They're not always successful, though, Rahusen—perhaps you remember the case of the man who called on me posing as a reporter. What did you do with his remains? Did you claim them at the mortuary?"

Rahusen was about to reply, when someone touched him on the arm.

"You're wanted on the telephone, boss."

"You will excuse me: I shan't be long."

As he turned away, Tiger flung him a taunt.

"If you're expecting to hear from the ex-seaman gentleman who was going to stick a knife in Bellamy's heart tonight, I'm afraid you're going to be disappointed."

The other paused.

"What's that?" he cried—and then: "I'll wait until I get back."

The telephone at this headquarters of gangdom was situated in a dark recess. Rahusen, forgetting in his rage how the ceiling dipped, knocked his head resoundingly, and cursed in adequate acknowledgement of the fact. Consequently he was in a vile mood when he picked up the receiver.

"Yes?" he snapped.

The reply turned him instantly cold. It was unexpected and unnerving.

"This is Voltag."

Those were not the words used—the words that came to him over the telephone were a mere jumble that would have sounded, to anyone not knowing the code, utter nonsense. But Rahusen knew their secret all right—and he realized from the very words used that it was really his taskmaster who spoke to him at the other end.

"What are you doing in London?" he asked.

"Never mind that," was the snapped answer. "Don't you hear what I tell you—the House of Commons business has been discovered! I want to see you straight away—that's why I've rung up. Straight away, you understand? I'll be at the corner of Baker Street, just outside that antique shop—what's the name?"

"Bowakers," replied the other.

"Bowakers, then. In five minutes. You will not forget to come?"

"No."

Strange things were afoot that night. London was yielding up a few of her myriad mysteries. When Rahusen turned the corner, walking swiftly and alone, he was instantly seized and bundled into a saloon car, the curtains of which were drawn.

"Good evening, Mr. Rahusen—or should I call you Mynheer Hans de Boo?"

The voice was not the voice of Emil Voltag; it was Sir Harker Bellamy who had addressed him—and the eyes of the Chief of Q.1 were gleaming with satisfaction and malicious pride.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE CLEAN-UP

"WELL, what are we going to do with this guy?"

For half an hour Tiger had been a prey to alternate hope and fear. The sudden and unexpected exit of Rahu-sen had given him heart in the midst of the darkest despair—but now the leader of the criminal gang who worked under his strangely transformed enemy was becoming impatient.

And something more than impatient—venomous. He turned to his companions.

"We've got to croak this guy—that's what I say. But first of all he's got to tell us where The Sailor is. What did you do with him?" he yelled, turning on the prisoner again.

All the contempt Standish had for this piece of human vileness was concentrated in his reply.

"I roasted the soles of his feet with a red-hot poker—that's what I did with him."

It was like a bomb bursting. Pandemonium flamed. The fierce passions of these denizens of the underworld became unleashed.

"Did you hear what he said?" cried Spike to the crowd.

"Yeah," was the curt comment of the nearest, "we 'eard."

"Well, I guess we'll get busy, boys."

They rushed at him in a body, commencing to tear off coat and waistcoat.

"We'll cut your heart out and show it to your old man," declared Spike Read.

Tiger knew that this enormity was quite possible to the speaker.

He could not fight because both wrists and ankles were tied. He could not even bite, because a rope had been drawn round his neck and he was being pressed backwards—*backwards* . . . He was almost beginning to pray for death now—if only it would come quickly. Naked to the waist, with his father staring as though he had been driven mad, he waited.

"Give me that knife, Larry," said Spike Read.

The mists cleared. Confusion still clogged his brain, but some kind of sense was forming itself out of the chaos. All he could remember was a sudden mighty noise that had been signalized by fierce oaths on the part of his enemies.

Now he felt a hand on his bare flesh. He shrank from its contact.

"It's all right, old boy," said a voice—and there, like a miracle from God, was a man he knew: *Sir Harold Lellant, Assistant Commissioner of Scotland Yard!*

He must be dreaming; this wonder had not really happened. It was merely a mirage sent by Fate to mock him still further.

But the voice that went on was steady and strong.

"We got here only in the nick of time, Tiger—but it *was* time, thank God! Here, drink this—it's brandy, and will do you good."

When the vital fluid had coursed its way through his veins, giving him new strength—and, what was far more helpful at that moment, an ability to grasp the outstanding facts of what he was being told—he made no comment until Lellant had come to an end.

Of all the strange things that had happened that night, this sudden arrival of a body of police sufficiently strong to capture that underground den and all its inhabitants was perhaps the most remarkable.

In his half-waking state, Standish had decided that the sight of Lellant standing before him was a miracle—and he was not far out in that first estimation.

"We have known of this place for some time, of course—there's no hideaway in London that the police do not get word of at some time or another—but we should not have come here tonight but for a message from Laroche—you remember Laroche?"

"Yes, I met him in Paris—heavens, how long ago?" asked Standish.

"Well," continued Lellant, "Laroche sent us word that he believed the man who had killed Torrance had fled first to Paris and then to London. They had gained some information about him in Montmartre, and this had led Laroche to the conclusion that when he reached London he would make for this underground bolthole. I tried to get into touch with Bellamy, but no one seemed to know where he was."

"I'll tell you something about that later on," said Standish. "Carry on now."

"I've practically come to an end," said the Assistant Commissioner. "Strictly speaking, this was Bellamy's job, but of course I should have given him all the help possible if he had come to me. In his absence, and feeling that I owed him a good turn, I got my men together and came along—just in time to see that brute about to mutilate you. . . . But it's all over now, Tiger; there's nothing you need worry about. Hullo, who the hell's this?"

It was a profane expression, marking—as profane expressions often do with men of the world—a subject not only for surprise but joy. There, standing in the doorway, was the very man they had been discussing: Sir Harker Bellamy, C.M.G.

The Mole stepped forward and held out his hand.

"My apologies, Standish," he said. "I see Lellant got here before me, but I had a rather important job of work to do. Our old friend Emil Voltag had arranged with Rahusen—or Hans de Boo, whichever you like—a

sweet little job of blowing up the House of Commons. Curiously enough, although I had wind of something of the sort from another quarter, it wasn't until I put another spoke in the wheel of Rahusen that I came across the real facts."

Tiger brushed the words aside.

"Tell me later," he said. "In the meantime, have you seen Sonia?"

The Mole smiled.

"Seen her? Of course I've seen her—what's more"—fumbling in his pocket—"I've got a note for you. Here it is."

Standish tore open the envelope, read what was written on the paper inside, and pressed it to his lips.

"Will somebody bring me beer?" he cried. "Beer! BEER! And a cigarette."

When a foaming tankard was placed near to his hand, he took a gulp and set it down with a heavy sigh.

"I don't want to hear another word," he said.

But when, that night, he sat at dinner at Quorn House with his wife, the most radiant woman in London, by his side, with Bellamy and Lellant occupying the other two seats at the table, he pressed The Mole for further details. The latter told him that it was from the lips of Sanya the clairvoyant^e that he had heard, not only of the proposed plot to blow up the House of Commons by means of a stranger hurling a bomb from the Strangers' Gallery, but of the secret code that the Kronstadtian spies, organized by Voltag in London, used when speaking to one another on the telephone. That was the means by which he had been able to trap Rahusen.

"How did the woman get hold of you, sweet?" Tiger asked, turning to his wife.

"I don't know," she replied.

"She used a powerful drug which, when exposed to the atmosphere, emitted fumes that paralysed the nerve-centres," supplied Bellamy.

The subject turned again to Rahusen.

"You've got him safe?" enquired Sonia.

"As safe as ten-inch walls can ensure," was the reply. "If you doubt me, ask Lellant here."

Sonia's lovely shoulders shook with the emotion she felt.

"Even now I cannot believe that it is over. I cannot believe that the three of us—the dear old Earl, Tiger, and myself—are all safe out of that series of horrors."

"How is Lord Quorn?" asked Lellant.

"Coming round wonderfully," was Standish's reply. "He would have given anything to be down with us to-night, but the doctor-wallahs simply wouldn't hear of it."

"Staunch old devil," said Bellamy admiringly. "I'll bet he never turned a hair right through it all. Here"—standing up and lifting his glass—"I'll give you a toast: The Old Boy—God bless him!"

There were no heeltaps.

THE END